SERMONS

Preached before the

HONOURABLE SOCIETY

OF

LINCOLN's-INN.

BY

JOHN LANGHORNE, D.D.
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IN TWO VOLUMES.

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TO

Robert Wilſon Cracroft, Eſq;

Dear SIR,

I Wiſh to give you ſome token of that regard and friendſhip I have ever entertained for you. It begun with the cultivation of your early youth, it can end only when every thing elſe that is dear muſt be forgotten. Let theſe little Tracts of religious

Philoſophy, if they may by any means ſurvive their Author, be a memorial that your moſt affectionate Friend and Brother was

JOHN LANGHORNE.

G JY 61

London,
Auguſt 29, 1772.

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SERMON I.

The Advantages of Religious Meditation.

GENESIS xxiv. 63.

Iſaac went out to meditate in the Field, at the Eventide.

IN the days of early innocence, and patriarchal ſimplicity, nature had a kind of dominion in the heart of man which ſhe ſeems now, in a great meaſure, to have loſt. While he was attentive only to the gratification of real wants, and found them ſupplied by her common bounty, he could not fail to love ſo kind a benefactreſs.

But through the refining arts of ſociety this ſimple attachment to nature has been deſtroyed. When artificial wants were diſcovered, which ſhe *alone* was no longer able to gratify, man withdrew his affection from her, and art and avarice took place of love and ſimplicity.

This change is not only to be lamented, as productive of miſeries which man was not made to ſuffer, but as deſtructive of that pure and reaſonable devotion, which the love of nature was intended to inſpire.

Was it not intended that this love ſhould lead us to the adoration of God? Why then are his works ſo formed for admiration and delight? Why then ſuch

order,

order, ſuch beauty, ſuch proportion in every part of the creation? Why is the eye delighted with variety of colouring, and why are light and ſhade ſo admirably mingled to produce that variety? Why are our ſenſes affected by fragrance or beauty, by ſymmetry or magnificence? Why do we rejoice to behold the glories of a riſing, or a ſetting ſun? and why do we feel an awful kind of pleaſure, when we behold the expanſe of heaven covered with innumerable ſtars?—The reaſon is obvious: The God of Nature formed our ſenſes to be affected by theſe objects, that, under the influence of love and admiration, we might learn to adore the wiſdom that created them.

Since then the contemplation of the viſible works of Providence ſeems to

have been intended as a motive to rational devotion, we ſhould do well to allot ſome time for exerciſes of this nature, and accompany the Patriarch *at eventide to meditate in the field.*

To indulge this contemplative diſpoſition muſt be more immediately neceſſary for thoſe whoſe lives roll in the circle of faſhionable diſſipation; who ſeem to think that the only end of their being is amuſement, and have not the leaſt idea of thoſe indiſpenſible duties, by which they are bound either as ſociable, or as dependent creatures.

Did they ſometimes meditate on the works of eternal wiſdom, and ſoberly conſider the end of their exiſtence, would they conclude it to be the proper employment of a rational creature to divide

it's life between dreſs and dancing, between ſleep and play——to fly from one amuſement to another, while art has any new expedient to flatter luxury, and while the invention of poverty can adminiſter to the wants of wealth?

Did they ever contemplate the wiſdom of that Being who gave them life, could they ſuppoſe that life to be given in vain? Could they conclude that a ſoul which can conceive the perfections of it's Creator, and which bears a ſhadow of thoſe perfections in itſelf, ſhould be created for no nobler purpoſe than an inſect—to flutter a while in the ſunſhine of feſtivity, and be no more?

Did they ſuſpend the purſuit of pleaſure to conſider the ſocial duties of man, would they ſuppoſe that the world was

furniſhed only for their particular entertainment; and that they had no other connections with, or engagements to their fellow creatures, than as they were neceſſary to their eaſe or amuſement; to contribute to their luxury, or gratify their pride? Would they not ſoon be convinced that thoſe who have the greateſt ſhare of this world's goods are but more diſtinguiſhed ſervants of the community; and the greater the power that has been committed to them, the more laborious muſt be their ſervice, and the more extenſive their charge?

Did they reflect on the duties of a dependent creature, would they not perceive the ſtrong obligations which muſt bind a created being to the Author of its exiſtence? Would they not conclude that, if acts of worſhip are the only offerings

offerings we are capable of making our ſupreme Creator, it is at leaſt our duty not to neglect thoſe——But when they were informed that the particular acts of obedience which God expected from them in return for their creation and preſervation, were *to do juſtly, to love mercy, and to walk humbly* with reſpect to *him*—would they not, in thoſe precepts, be ſtruck with a general idea of their duty both religious and ſocial, and be convinced that the latter was founded on the former?—

Such reflections as theſe are certainly proper for Beings that are born to be accountable for the life that is lent them: But, how ſeldom do we yield admiſſion to ſuch reflections as theſe!—The world, the inſinuating world has the art of engroſſing our attention—Its objects ſtill

prevail, however inſignificant; nor is it ſufficient that we have been once deceived: The cheat is ſtill practiſed upon us; we are again diſappointed, yet we embrace it again.

It is, therefore, convenient that we ſhould ſometimes retire from a ſcene of danger and diſſipation—retire with Iſaac into the field, and meditate.

Man, indeed, was not made for *perpetual* ſolitude—His powers, his dependencies, all declare againſt it; but *occaſionally* to leave the buſineſs and the tumult of ſociety—to retire into himſelf, and *to commune with his own heart*, whether, with the Prophet in his chamber, or with the Patriarch in the field, is not only expedient, but even neceſſary.

There

There is ſcarce any taſk ſo unwelcome to us as the review of our own minds, and hence it is that we are, in general, ſo little acquainted with the ſtate of them. Our inclinations change inſenſibly, and the heart takes a different bias by imperceptible degrees; inſomuch that when we come to compare our preſent conduct with what was our manner of life a few years ago, we are ſurprized to obſerve the difference, becauſe we attended not to the progreſſive change of our ſentiments and diſpoſitions.

For this reaſon, we ought, by frequent meditation, to examine the *ſtate* of our minds, to inquire how we ſtand affected to the great branches of our duty, by placing them reſpectively in view; but more particularly to make it our queſtion, whether we are ſenſible of that pious gratitude

titude to our Creator, which is the firſt and beſt foundation of religious obedience.

Enquiries theſe are that demand the hour of privacy and recollection, when the paſſions are all obedient to the underſtanding, and even ſelf-intereſt and ſelf-love ſubmit to the ſearch of truth.

Then let us ſummon our hearts to their trial, when their ſpecious advocates are at a diſtance; when they can derive no confidence from the flattering preſence of worldly objects, and are no longer *hardened by the deceitfulneſs of ſin.*

For this, let me once more obſerve that, retirement is the proper ſcene. The world is an enemy that is not to be ſubdued, but by frequent retreats; we muſt contend with it as the Parthians of old

old did with their adverſaries, and fly, while we maintain the fight.

But in all our religious meditations there is one circumſtance which we ought never to forget, and that is the *deceitfulneſs of the heart*. However cloſely or impartially we examine it; we ſhall hardly bring it to an open or an ingenuous confeſſion. It has ſtill ſome evaſion, ſome apology, ſome palliating circumſtance for every charge that is brought againſt it. If we place its deformities before it, it has the art of ſhifting the ſcene, and of diſplaying its ſuppoſed perfections in their ſtead. If we charge it with ſome particular vice, or foible, it derives encouragement from compariſon, and inſtead of acknowledging and amending its own faults, it ſets itſelf at eaſe by conſidering the imperfections of others.

For

For this evil there is no better remedy than that which the Pſalmiſt has recourſe to, when he implores the aſſiſtance of that Being, who is properly called the *Searcher of hearts*. *The righteous God*, ſays he, *proveth the heart—His eyelids try the children of men——Examine me, O Lord, and prove me: Try my reins, and my heart. Who can tell how oft he offendeth? O cleanſe thou me from my ſecret faults.*

The author of theſe petitions was, excluſive of his inſpired knowledge, by no means a ſtranger to the human heart. He had experienced its treachery: He knew its propenſity to error, to folly and to vice. He knew, that an enemy concealed under the maſk of friendſhip was of all others the moſt dangerous,

and

and he conſidered his own heart as ſuch. He was ſenſible that in this reſpect too he was liable to be *betrayed by his own familiar friend*, with whom he had likewiſe *taken ſweet council*.

It is from the ſtrongeſt convictions, therefore, that he applies to a ſuperior power, and prays for deliverance from an enemy ſo inſidious, and ſo near. Such, under the ſame circumſtances, ſhould be the conduct of every Chriſtian. *If our hearts condemn us not*, yet let us pray for a more perfect knowledge of, and command over them, to that Being, who *is greater than our hearts, and knoweth all things*.

This will not only be the moſt effectual, but the ſafeſt method of ſelf-examination;

amination; for when, with all becoming humility, we implore the aſſiſtance of God in that duty, we have nothing fur ther to fear from the event of it, becauſe we have done whatever was in our own power towards it.

Theſe are reflections which naturally aroſe upon the ſubject of religious meditation.——Let us now turn our eyes a moment on the contemplative Patriarch. He *went out*, we are told, *to meditate in the field at the eventide.* This was at the moſt critical juncture of his life; for he was now in expectation that the divine promiſe would ſoon be fulfilled in a circumſtance of no leſs conſequence than that of giving him a wife, in whoſe offſpring all the generations of the earth were to be bleſſed.

With

With ſuch glorious and exalted views, it was natural for him to retire, and indulge his thoughts in private. Great joys, like great ſorrows, love to be alone, and a *ſtranger doth not intermeddle with them.* It is, therefore, with the greateſt propriety that the hiſtorian repreſents Iſaac upon this occaſion as retiring into the field for meditation.

The probable ſubject of his reflections was nothing leſs than the accompliſhment of the divine promiſe—a ſubject, in every reſpect, the nobleſt, and the moſt delightful that the human mind is capable of contemplating! To the Patriarch it muſt have been particularly ſo upon this occaſion, for while he was yet meditating on thoſe promiſes, he beheld them accompliſhed.

"He lifted up his eyes and ſaw, and, "behold, the camels were coming.

"And Rebekah lifted up her eyes, "and when ſhe ſaw Iſaac, ſhe lighted off "the camel.

"For ſhe had ſaid unto the ſervant, "What man is this that walketh in the "field to meet us? And the ſervant had "ſaid, It is my maſter."

As it will not be a far-fetched, ſo I hope it will not altogether be an uſeleſs exhortation, if I recommend it to you, while you walk through the field of this life, like the Patriarch, to make the promiſes of God the ſubject of your meditation. You have, you will ſay, no perſonal or particular promiſes, ſuch as the ſon of Abraham was favoured with. —That may be true—but how much greater,

greater, how much more glorious are your expectations than his? His were confined merely to the long ſucceſſion of an earthly poſterity, but you look up to an inheritance of immortality, to *an houſe not made with hands, incorruptible in the heavens.* Theſe magnificent promiſes you have from the ſame gracious Power, in whom the Patriarch *truſted and was not deceived*; whoſe *hand is not ſhortened that it cannot ſave*, and part of whoſe glorious character it is, that *he keepeth his promiſe for ever.*

Through every period of this uncertain life let us conſtantly meditate on the eternal promiſes. The eventide will ſoon come, when, like Iſaac, we ſhall ſee them accompliſhed —— when we ſhall meet that everlaſting love which firſt brought us into this ſtate of being, and ſhall finally remove us from it. Let

this be our *ſtrong conſolation, who have fled for refuge to lay hold on the hope ſet before us; which hope we have as an anchor of our ſouls, ſtedfaſt and immoveable.* This hope it was that ſupported our fellow-chriſtians in all the painful conflicts of their ſpiritual warfare: And it is this that muſt afford us the only reaſonable conſolation under every diſtreſsful, or diſcouraging event.

" Why art thou ſo full of heavineſs, " O my ſoul! And why art thou ſo " diſquieted within me? Truſt in God." —Repoſe on his infallible word, his immutable promiſes; and in every various ſituation of life the ETERNAL PROVIDENCE ſhall *never fail thee nor forſake thee.* Whether thou art in the city, or whether thou art in the field; *bleſſed ſhalt thou be in the city, and bleſſed ſhalt thou be in the field.*

SERMON II.

The Reſurrection of Lazarus.

LUKE xi. 44.

He that was dead came forth.

THE reſurrection of Lazarus not only affords a firm proof in favour of Chriſtianity, but exhibits a very pleaſing picture of its amiable Author. While we read the ſtory, the miracle itſelf does not ſo much engage our attention, as the circumſtances of tenderneſs that lead to it: We admire that

divine power which could re-animate the dead, but the ſenſibility of friendſhip carries away our hearts: And, when we behold that divine Perſon who entered into this ſtate, Being for the benevolent purpoſe of our redemption, melting under the tender ſenſations of friendſhip, that reverence we owe to the dignity of his character forgets itſelf in affection.

The ſtory of Lazarus is recorded by that beloved diſciple who was eminent for his ſenſibility and affectionate diſpoſition. Hence it is that we find it related with all thoſe tender circumſtances that await the event of death, when female ſoftneſs bewails the loſs of a brother, and friendſhip is a mourner at the grave.

The

The ſacred writer opens his ſtory with the ſickneſs of Lazarus, and diſtinguiſhes him as the brother of that pious woman, who had *anointed the Lord with ointment, and wiped his feet with her hair.* Theſe good offices juſtly entitled her to call upon him for his aſſiſtance in a caſe where he might be eminently ſerviceable. She, therefore, with her ſiſter, *ſent unto him, ſaying, Lord, behold whom thou loveſt, is ſick.* The hiſtorian has not mentioned the purpoſe of this meſſage, but it was ſent moſt probably with the hope of what ſome of the Jews preſent ſuggeſted afterward, that he *who opened the eyes of the blind, could cauſe that this man ſhould not die.* At the ſame time it might be hoped that the conſolations of friendſhip would afford ſome relief to their afflicted brother; for the pity of thoſe

we love has power to ſoothe the heart, even while the body labours under the languor of ſickneſs.

But whatever might be the purpoſe of the meſſage, it had not the effect which was, undoubtedly, expected from it; for Jeſus did not immediately go to Bethany, though *he, whom he loved, was ſick.* Yet why? — why were the kind offices of friendſhip refuſed, at a time, when they were wanted ſo much? Or why was that healing power, which had been ſo effectually and ſo generally exerted, ſuſpended, in a caſe where affection, and even gratitude, appeared to demand it? Could he, whoſe benevolence was univerſal, who could reſtore the daughter of the Syrophenician woman — could he withhold that aid from a friend

a friend which he ſo liberally gave to ſtrangers? How could he ſuffer *him whom he loved* to languiſh to death? How could he, after *he had heard that* his friend *was ſick, abide two days ſtill in the ſame place where he was?* The reaſon for this he aſſigns himſelf, viz. that it was *for the glory of God, that the Son of God might be glorified thereby.* —Yet it was not only for the glory of God, but for the benefit of the ſufferer. When by ſuch an aſtoniſhing proof he was convinced of the divine nature of his friend, with what joy muſt he have returned from the regions of death? With what certainty of faith muſt he have confided in his Redeemer? How inexpreſſibly delightful muſt thoſe reflections have been which told him he had an intereſt with that all-powerful Being, who could bring back life from the

womb of deſtruction?--Who could reſtore the cold and inſenſible body to all its faculties and functions, and *lighten thoſe eyes, that had ſlept the ſleep of death?* Were *the ſufferings* of a tranſient ſickneſs *to be compared with the glory* that was thus *revealed?* The friends of the deceaſed, moreover, his ſorrowing ſiſters had not only the joy of beholding their brother reſtored to life, but received from this event that confirmation of their faith which would from thenceforth be an unfailing ſource of happineſs.

Thus it is that the gracious God dealeth with the children of men. He is in nowiſe the author of their ſufferings. They flow from moral, or, as the ſickneſs of Lazarus did, from natural cauſes.——But how oft does the divine Providence bring good out of evil!

And how frequently, through his gracious interpoſition, is our *ſorrow turned into joy!*

Upon theſe principles did the friend of Lazarus forbear to viſit him during his ſickneſs; but when by his divine knowledge, he found that he was dead, Our *friend Lazarus ſleepeth*, ſays he, *but I go that I may awake him.*

It appears that the diſciples too had a regard for this amiable man, which was the reaſon why their maſter did not, out of tenderneſs to them, expreſs himſelf clearly on the death of Lazarus: It appears ſo, and it is evident; for when *he told them plainly*, "*Lazarus is dead*," Thomas exclaimed with pathetic ſorrow, *Then let us go that we may die with him.*

him. "Alas! is our friend Lazarus "dead? Is he that loved us no more? "What is there in this world that is *now* "worth living for? Is there yet ano-"ther Lazarus? Another that will love "us? None, none! *then let us go, that* "*we may die with him.*" Theſe are the natural complaints of ſurviving friend-ſhip, when thoſe, who are dearer to us than life itſelf, are irrecoverably torn away by the hand of death. Nor does it appear, as Thomas met with no re-buke for his exclamation, that theſe complaints are diſagreeable to Provi-dence. They are conſidered, no doubt, as the unavoidable effuſions of paſſions that are in themſelves blameleſs; and ſorrows of this kind are then only cul-pable, when they grow into habitual murmuring.

But

But let us now accompany the mourning diſciples and their maſter to viſit the afflicted ſiſters, and the tomb of Lazarus. *Martha*, ſays the Evangeliſt, *as ſoon as ſhe heard of the coming of Jeſus, went and met him*, and ſaid, *Lord, if thou hadſt been here, my brother had not died.* This ſeems to be a modeſt and unaffected complaint that Jeſus had not viſited his friend during his ſickneſs; but it was, at the ſame time, an acceptable inſtance of faith, which indeed ſhe proves to be very great, when ſhe adds, *I know, that, even now, whatſoever thou wilt aſk of God, God will give it thee.* As a reward for this diſtinguiſhed faith, Jeſus immediately tells her that her *brother* ſhould *riſe again*; and when ſhe ſuppoſed that he alluded to the general reſurrection, he takes an opportunity from thence to inform her of his own important appointment; and the ſuperior privileges of thoſe that believe

in

in him. *I*, ſays he, *am the reſurrection, and the life; whoſoever believeth in me, though he were dead, yet ſhall he live; and he that liveth, and believeth in me, ſhall never die.* This was, indeed, a glorious declaration, and properly expreſſive of *his* divine miſſion, who brought *life and immortality to light.*

But Martha was not the only one who made a confeſſion of faith on this occaſion; the Jews, who came from Jeruſalem to pay their viſits of condolence, made it their queſtion, whether he, *who opened the eyes of the blind, could not have cauſed that even this man ſhould not have died.* Strange! that the Jews ſhould admit ſuch a ſuppoſition, who were, in general, remarkable for their infidelity, and from whoſe perſecutions Jeſus had ſo lately been obliged to fly. Nay, it is

evident

evident that he now returned to Bethany with caution and ſecrecy on their account, from the reception he met with, and the private audience he appeats to have had of Martha and Mary. Is it not ſtrange then, I ſay, that theſe Jews ſhould drop any thing like an expreſſion of faith? Certainly it appears ſo, but, perhaps, it may be accounted for thus.

The mind is never ſo willing to let go its prejudices as at thoſe times when ſorrow, or mourning, or the evils of life take hold of it. Scenes of affliction and diſtreſs ſubdue the pride of the heart, and obtain admiſſion for piety and truth. Now theſe Jews really condoled with the ſiſters of Lazarus, for the Evangeliſt tells us they wept; and this, therefore, was a proper ſeaſon for faith to gain the aſcendant of prejudice.

When

When Jeſus joined this family of mourners, *he groaned in the ſpirit*, ſays the ſacred writer, *and was troubled*; but when he came to the tomb where his departed friend was laid—*he wept*. He could no longer reſiſt the tender ſenſations of friendſhip, and though he knew that, the next moment, he ſhould ſee Lazarus reſtored to life, he could not look on that body, which contained a heart that once had loved him, without a tear. *Jeſus wept*. The Son of God beheld with tears that body inanimate to which he was now about to reſtore the faculties of life.——Yet as a man, and as a friend he wept.—Jeſus wept—but it was at the grave of friendſhip: And the tears that fall on ſuch a grave are the tears of virtue. That fortitude, which refuſes the tribute of mourning *there*, differs not from inſenſibility. It is gratitude

titude to weep over a departed friend: I had almoſt called it piety—The ancients did give it that name.

Jeſus wept—He, who brought eternal life to his creatures, wept that one ſhould die! Who knows what paſſions might, at that moment, agitate his ſacred boſom? Who knows, whether, as he looked upon his lifeleſs friend, he did not revolve in his gracious mind all the miſeries to which mankind are ſubject; all the various evils of life, and death, the laſt and greateſt evil? Who knows whether ſome of thoſe tears that fell over the grave of Lazarus were not excited by reflecting on the ruin of human nature, that nature which he had taken upon him, and which it was his purpoſe to reſtore to the original privilege of life?

Thus the divine Benevolence indulged the ſweeteſt and moſt amiable of all human ſenſations, the tenderneſs of pity and friendſhip.

But the time was now come, when he ſhould exert his power—*Father I thank thee*, ſays he, *that thou haſt heard me, and I knew that thou heareſt me always: but, becauſe of the people which ſtand by I ſaid it, that they may believe that thou haſt ſent me.* This was a very ſolemn introduction to the great miracle he was about to perform; and it muſt have rendered the effect of it ſtill more ſtriking to the people, when they beheld the immediate power of God obedient to the prayers of this divine man. Accordingly *when he had thus ſpoken, he cried with a loud voice*, "LAZARUS COME FORTH." Let us for a moment imagine ourſelves at this ſolemn

ſcene

ſcene——Behold! what various degrees of curioſity and expectation are written upon the faces of thoſe who *ſtand by!* See, how full of expreſſion is every feature at this critical moment when the dead is called upon *to come forth!* Methinks I behold on one countenance the firm confidence of faith, and on another the ſuſpenſion of doubt, while a third expreſſes the careleſneſs, and half-concealed ſcorn of diſbelief. One is attending with eager eyes to mark the firſt ſymptoms of returning life, while another is ſmiling at the vain confidence and credulity of his neighbour. The Son of God himſelf ſtands over the grave with looks expreſſing the aſſurance of his efficacious power; but marked at the ſame time, with the pleaſing expectation of ſoon embracing his reviving friend —But the ſiſters, the faithful and affectionate ſiſ-

ters—See with what anxious eagerneſs *they* bend over their brother's grave! See how trembling expectation waits for the firſt ſignal of life! In this caſe *perfect love* doth NOT *caſt out fear*, nor doth faith itſelf attend the iſſue without wavering. See how their eyes ſtrain to catch the returning ſenſe! Hah! it returns—the colour returns to the pale lips—They move—The blood wanders over the countenance—The eye-balls move—The eye-lids open—He lives—Lazarus lives.

From the contemplation of ſuch wonderful events as theſe we may derive much religious improvement. They animate our devotion, confirm our faith, and even exalt our ideas of that glorious Being whom we ſerve. At the ſame time ſcenes of pathetic tenderneſs, where the gentle

gentle affections are exerciſed and called forth, ſoften and ſubdue the mind: They recal us from the idle purſuits of feſtivity, or the more laborious vanities of falſe ambition.

Who, that contemplates the lamented death of Lazarus, but would rather wiſh that his remains might be embalmed by the tears of private friendſhip, than that the report of his death ſhould ſpread from region to region, and be heard with indifference, till it was heard no more: —Who, that conſiders the miraculous circumſtances of his reſurrection, would think it worth his while to labour for the intereſt of any power but that which ſhall re-animate the dead? — Is it poſſible to reflect on the ſtory of Lazarus, and not wiſh to have partaken of that tender affection which wept over his grave?—

To have been diſtinguiſhed by the favour of that gracious Redeemer who feels ſo tenderly for the ſufferings of his creatures, who died for their ſins, and roſe again for their deliverance from the grave? If it be natural to form theſe wiſhes, let us reflect that this Redeemer ſtill liveth, and liveth to make interceſſion for us; that, like Lazarus, we may be diſtinguiſhed by his favour, and, like him, through his power, riſe again from the dead.

SERMON III.

The different Conditions of the Wicked and the Righteous conſidered in ſome particular Views.

PROV. iv. 18, 19.

The Path of the Juſt is as the ſhining Light, that ſhineth more and more unto the perfect Day.

But the Way of the Wicked is as Darkneſs; they know not at what they ſtumble.

NEVER was there a more juſt, or a more ſtriking picture than that which is exhibited in theſe two ſhort verſes. It appears, indeed, from all the

writings of the ſon of David that he had a conſummate knowledge of human nature, and a deep penetration into the minds and manners of men: But in this paſſage he has even outſhone himſelf, and has added to the ſolid truths of the moraliſt the ſtrength of the poet's imagination.

I. *The path of the juſt is as the ſhining light.* His way is directed by that of truth, which is *a lanthorn to his feet, and a light unto his paths*—He derives his intelligence from the fountains of eternal knowledge, and follows the guidance of infallible wiſdom! Is it poſſible that darkneſs ſhould fall upon his path, or that his life ſhould be miſdirected, while it is conducted by the rules of him who gave it? Is not he who conſtructs a machine moſt capable of ordering its motions,

tions, and of giving laws for its due regulation? While the actions of man are directed by the laws of God, it is ſo long impoſſible that he ſhould go blindly forward, or that his feet ſhould not walk in the way of knowledge. He moves in one certain and limited ſphere, where his way is plain before him; and his guide is continually at hand to direct him, that he turn not *to the right hand, or to the left.*

Can any thing be more deſirable, in this valley of darkneſs and uncertainty, than to walk under the brightneſs of perpetual day?—than to have our paths illumined by that glorious Being, who has *arrayed himſelf with light as with a garment?*

This is nothing more than what a good man continually enjoys. While he makes the revealed will of God the rule of his actions, he walks for ever in *the light of his countenance*; and he that made him *ordereth his goings*.

But as the path of the juſt may be ſaid to be a ſhining light with reſpect to its certainty and clearneſs, ſo likewiſe it may be termed in conſideration of that pleaſure and chearfulneſs which it affords to thoſe *wiſe children*, who have the happineſs to *walk therein*. *Their ways are*, indeed, *ways of pleaſantneſs*. They are equally ſtrangers to the anxieties of doubt and the apprehenſions of fear. They neither regret the proſpect that is behind them, nor tremble at that which lies before. Eaſy and ſerene, they proceed

ceed to the boundaries of life, and approach them with unſhaken repoſe.

" Behold, ſay they, here is the end of
" all our toils, the limits of our earthly
" exiſtence. We have *finiſhed the courſe*
" of life, and *henceforth there is laid up*
" *for* us a reward that fadeth not away.
" As we have hitherto walked in the
" light of the everlaſting God, ſo we
" ſhall henceforward enjoy his glorious
" preſence. Not ſtrangers to the com-
" forts of doing his will on earth, lo!
" now, we ſhall have the honour and the
" happineſs of fulfilling it in heaven—
" we go to that *innumerable company of*
" *Angels*, that exalted ſociety of ſpiri-
" tual Beings, who have either, like us,
" diſcharged the offices of a mortal life,
" or have been created from eterni-
" ty,

" ty, the attendants of their immortal " Maker."

With theſe ſublime and animating reflections the juſt man cloſes his life; but before a ſtate of mind like this can be attained, he muſt long have toiled in the paths of duty; the habits of virtue muſt have been confirmed by time, the expectations of immortality enſured by the firmeſt faith; and hope muſt have been long in poſſeſſion of the mind, before it can leave behind it a moral certainty of that happineſs it had in view. For,

II. Though *the path of the juſt is* always *as a ſhining light*, yet its brightneſs is progreſſive, and it *ſhineth more and more unto the perfect day*.

To whatever the depravity of the human mind may have been owing originally, nothing is more certain than that it is ſtrangely depraved. Even virtue herſelf, all amiable as ſhe is, muſt be long a ſolicitor, before ſhe obtains any eſtabliſhed intereſt in the heart. Even that degree of moral perfection which is attainable in this life muſt be an acquiſition of time, and cannot be attained without long aſſiduity. The diſpoſitions of the mind, naturally tending to vice, are not to be ſubdued inſtantaneouſly, nor are ſuch converſions, ſince the ceſſation of miracles, either to be hoped for or believed.

Fanatics, indeed, will pretend to refer you to the day, or to the very hour, when THE GREAT WORK WAS WROUGHT IN THEM, but this is to be numbered amongſt

amongſt the many vain deluſions of a people whoſe religion is directed by imagination.

The change from vice to virtue muſt be gradually brought about. Reaſon is ſlow in its operations, and unleſs the converſion be the work of reaſon, it ſtands upon an uncertain foundation, and will probably endure but a ſhort time. The paſſions, indeed, are more active in their execution; but as they are in themſelves changeable, ſo will be all their effects.

How ſlowly reaſon prevails upon the heart to conquer any favourite inclination is well known to every man who has made the attempt. But though it is difficult, it is far from being impoſſible; the moſt arduous parts of religious duty

are

are to be overcome by the concurring aſſiſtance of heaven, and he whoſe heart is impreſt with the deepeſt characters of vice may in time be reclaimed by the aſſiduities of reaſon, aſſiſted and ſupported by the divine influence.

Can I here forbear to obſerve how ſtrong an admonition this difficulty of converſion affords againſt ſinking deep in the habits of ſin? Who would render ſtill more laborious a taſk which muſt once be performed? Who would add weight to a burthen which he apprehends to be already too heavy, and which, nevertheleſs, he muſt bear, or periſh?

However, after theſe diſagreeable truths, it may afford us ſome conſolation, that when once we have ſet our feet in the ſhining path of the juſt, virtue will become

become more eaſy to us, as it becomes more habitual; that we ſhall receive new light, and freſh encouragement the further we proceed, and that the way of the righteous *ſhineth more and more unto the perfect day.*

If vice can have charms ſufficient to eſtabliſh herſelf more ſecurely by habit and cuſtom; if guilt, whoſe allurements are ſpecious and deceitful, can, in time, reconcile the heart to all its horrible deformities, much more ſurely ſhall goodneſs, ſhall virtue prevail by habit. Theſe are like faithful friends—the further trial we have of them, we ſhall find cauſe to love, and value them the more.

That the pleaſure of religious duty increaſes in proportion to the practice of it, we need only appeal to the teſtimony of

of good men in all ages. The kingdom of God is, in this reſpect, to every individual, as *a grain of muſtard ſeed*, ſmall and inconſiderable in its firſt principles, but, by time and proper cultivation, growing up and flouriſhing into a magnificent body.

It is thus too that a righteous perſon may be conſidered metaphorically as a *tree planted by the rivers of water*, which not only *bringeth forth its fruit in due ſeaſon*, but from the nature of its nutritious ſituation, acquires a ſtronger and more ample growth.

The life of a good man affords a proſpect not unlike that of a mountainous country—Upon the firſt view it appears barren and ſolitary, but as we proceed, the ſcene changes; and we are preſented with

with views of fertility and beauty; which grow ſtill more delightful, the farther we advance.

The righteous not only *run with patience the race that is ſet before them*, but acquire new ſtrength and activity, as they approach towards the end. Animated by the divine promiſes, they ſtretch forward to obtain *the high prize of their calling*, the final objects of that unſhaken faith, whoſe victorious influence *overcometh the world*.—Thus it is that the light of the juſt *ſhineth more and more unto the perfect day*.

II. But *the way of the wicked is as darkneſs*.

But are not the powers of reaſon and intelligence equally enjoyed by the wicked

wicked as by the righteous, and doth not God *make his ſun to ſhine both on the juſt and on the unjuſt?* How then ſhould the way of the wicked be as darkneſs?

A ſtate of wickedneſs is always denominated, by the ſacred writers, a ſtate of darkneſs. That terrible image ſeemed to be moſt expreſſive of the unhappy condition of thoſe, who walked in the *blindneſs of their mind, alienated from the life of God.* Death is another image by which their ſtate is deſcribed. Thus the wicked are ſaid to be *dead in treſpaſſes and ſins*; and the Apoſtle gives them a ſolemn ſummons, as it were from the grave. *Awake thou that ſleepeſt, and ariſe from the dead, and Chriſt ſhall give thee light.* But what is ſtill more expreſs to the preſent purpoſe is the language of Chriſt himſelf. *When thine*

eye is evil, ſays he, *thy body alſo is full of darkneſs—Take heed therefore that the light which is in thee be not darkneſs!* This is as St. Luke relates the paſſage: St. Matthew has it more emphatically. *If the light which is in thee be darkneſs, how great is* THAT *darkneſs.*

The propriety of theſe ſcripture images will appear more clearly if we conſider the tendency which vice has to darken the underſtanding. It is neceſſary that the power of reaſon ſhould be in a great degree ſuſpended before a man can implicitly give himſelf up to the dominion of wickedneſs: For though the heart has a natural propenſity to vice, it is guarded by a moral ſenſe of right and wrong, and this ſenſe muſt neceſſarily be extinguiſhed or ſuſpended before any man can become indiſcriminately wicked.

It is the ſuſpenſion of this ſenſe, and the perverſion of the underſtanding which conſtitutes the moral darkneſs that is mentioned in the text.

When the heart is devoted to wickedneſs, and involved in guilt, the underſtanding is generally perverted by the paſſions. A man may reſt contented without the approbation of others, but he cannot be ſatisfied without his own; he therefore ſeeks for arguments, however fallacious, to perſuade himſelf that he is in the right, and makes his underſtanding the dupe of his heart.

But, compared *to the ſhining path* of the righteous, *the way of the wicked is as darkneſs* in many other reſpects. For what are his proſpects either preſent or future? What but a melancholy paſſage

through this region of ſorrow, terminating, at beſt, in an inſenſible grave? Where are the hopes that ſhould comfort him under the anguiſh of affliction? Where is the faith that ſhould ſupport him in the moments of anxiety? Where is the conſcience that might encourage him in the hour of reflection? Alas! his hope ends with that life, of whoſe miſeries he complains; and, to uſe the language of the Apoſtle, inſtead of *holding faith and a good conſcience, concerning faith he has made ſhipwreck.*

IV. In this miſerable and hopeleſs ſituation——this more than Egyptian darkneſs, no wonder if the wicked *know not at what they ſtumble.* While the mind is in a ſtate of perplexing uncertainty, without any determinate principle of faith, or any rule of action,

diſſatisfaction

diſſatisfaction and confuſion muſt be unavoidable.

It is impoſſible for any man, however wicked, wholly to diveſt himſelf of the apprehenſions of futurity — Theſe *will* attack him at certain times, unhinge his reſolutions, and deſtroy his confidence— Nay, though he holds himſelf the avowed enemy of ſuperſtition, he will often be more ſuperſtitious than thoſe whoſe faith is the ſubject of his ridicule—he will often be haunted with groundleſs fears, and become the ſlave of childiſh timidity.

This is agreeable to the character that is given of him in another part of the book of Proverbs, viz. that *he fleeth when no one purſues*; which has the ſame ſenſe as the expreſſion in the text, *they ſtumble at they know not what.*

Such and ſo different are the characters and conditions of the wicked and the righteous. The life of the one, directed by the divine wiſdom and goodneſs, is ſerene and chearful, and comfortable as the light: That of the other, guided by no principle of reaſon, no laws of that Being who gave it, is gloomy, and perplexing, and uncomfortable as darkneſs.

The righteous ſupported by faith and hope, finds his happineſs increaſe with his piety, and ſees the journey of life grow brighter, and more inviting towards its end: While the wicked, deſtitute of every hope that might reconcile him to futurity, wanders miſerably forward in darkneſs and uncertainty; perplexed both with fears that are, and with apprehenſions that are not vain.

Behold

Behold here, my friends, two different lots! Chuſe which ſhall be your own. Halt not between two opinions. *If the Lord be God, worſhip him; but if Baal, then worſhip him.* If the ways of wickedneſs delight you, remember they lead through darkneſs to death—If the path of the juſt be your choice, enter into it, and may God *proſper you on your way.*

SERMON IV.

The different Conditions of the Wicked and the Righteous considered in ſeveral Views.

PSALM CXVIII. 15.

The Voice of Joy and Health is in the Dwelling of the Righteous.

WERE the principles of religion recommended to us only by the influence they muſt have on the happineſs of human life, no wiſe man would haſtily deſpiſe them.

For,

For, if human laws have their foundation, their ſecurity in thoſe principles; if the order and the harmony of ſociety are preſerved by them; if they enforce the virtues of temperance and good will, and produce both health of body and peace of mind—ſuch effects are ſurely moſt intereſting.

But, in the firſt place, we ſhould make it our enquiry, whether religion is really capable of producing ſuch effects, or whether ſhe does not owe all her amiable attributes to the partial praiſes of her own profeſſors.

This enquiry we ſhall be able to proſecute moſt effectually by comparing the oppoſite characters of the wicked and the righteous, by conſidering the lives of thoſe who make religion their guide,

and

and of thoſe who are actuated by different principles.

While we purſue the argument, it may be worth our while to take in the obſervations which the ſacred writers have given us on this ſubject, not in order to borrow any evidence from their aſſertions, but, if poſſible, to illuſtrate and confirm their obſervations, by an appeal to experience, and by the teſtimony of facts.

"The wicked fleeth when no one "purſues; but the righteous is as bold "as a lion."

Guilt and fear are inſeparable. He who is conſcious of a crime, if he is not dead to all ſenſibility, muſt be apprehenſive either of puniſhment or diſgrace; or,

or, ſhould he triumph undetected in the ſecrecy of his villainy, he cannot fly the accuſations of his own heart—Conſcience will ſolicit him with the moſt unwelcome impertinence—with honeſt obſtinacy, will hold up the mirror to his conduct, alarm him with the future, and reproach him with the paſt. This is not an imaginary picture: It is borrowed from the univerſal experience, and acknowledgement of mankind. All agree that fear is the companion of vice; and the teſtimony of thoſe who have happily returned to virtue is, in this caſe, indiſputable.

On the other hand, he who acts upon the principles of religion, lives and thinks at eaſe. He has nothing to apprehend either from puniſhment, or diſgrace, from an injured neighbour, or an offended

offended God. His boldneſs is not the triumph of daring guilt, not an affected confidence ariſing from the overthrow of truth and reflection, which can laſt only during the hour of riot, or the indolence of ſtupefaction—it is a ſteady and a laſting principle, ſupported by the teſtimonies of conſcience and of reaſon. A good man is, therefore, in no circumſtances ſubject to any other fear than that reverence for his God which ſoothes him, while it awes——that delightful fear, which, founded in love and gratitude, knows no other anxiety, than what accompanies the agreeable deſire to pleaſe.

" I have ſeen the wicked in great " power, and ſpreading himſelf like the " green bay; but he paſſed away, and, " lo! he was not; I ſought him, but " he

"he could not be found. * * * Yet "have I never ſeen the righteous for- "ſaken, nor his ſeed begging their "bread."

Such were the obſervations of the Pſalmiſt, with reſpect to the temporal conditions of the wicked and the righteous.—But here it may, poſſibly, be objected that, under the moſaical diſpenſation, temporal rewards and puniſhments were the principal ſanctions of religion; and that theſe were neceſſarily more manifeſt, in proportion as the proſpects of futurity were leſs certain—that the Jews, in general, looked upon the misfortunes and afflictions of the wicked to be the immediate effect of the divine judgments; and that it was, therefore, no wonder, if the writer of the Pſalms let fall an obſervation which was

the obvious conſequence of a principle of faith. To theſe objections I will allow their full force without exception, or reply—I deſire nothing more than an appeal to the experience of mankind, and to common obſervation, whether ſucceſs is not naturally annexed to virtue, and whether miſery and misfortune are not the moral conſequences of vice, altogether excluſive of divine ſanctions and interpoſitions.

Have not many of thoſe, who by diſhoneſt means have raiſed themſelves to the eminence of power, fallen a ſacrifice, either to private treachery, or to public reſentment? Can he, who owes his dignity to villainous combinations, ſecure any intereſt with the faithful, or with the honeſt? And—if not, is he not always liable to be ſubverted by the ſame

wretches

wretches who contributed to raiſe him? Will *they* hazard themſelves in the defence of a man, whom either the views of private intereſt, or a natural proneneſs to villainy alone excited them to raiſe? Nay, will they not even rejoice in the ruin of ſuch a man, not from the love of virtue, or of their country, but from an innate principle of malignity? —The hiſtory of the world furniſhes us with numberleſs inſtances of this kind.

On the contrary, a good man has the patronage of mankind for his ſupport; and it has ſeldom been known, even amongſt unenlightened nations, that he has not died in peace. It has rarely happened that he, who was eminently diſtinguiſhed by his virtues, has been long diſtreſſed either by envy or oppreſſion.

Some

Some inſtances, no doubt, there are, not only where the righteous have ſuffered promiſcuouſly with the wicked, but where the power of the latter has oppreſſed the former even to death. Theſe are the inevitable conſequences of moral evil, without the admiſſion of which, freedom of will, and even the poſſibility of virtue, would be totally deſtroyed. But theſe afford no general proof that goodneſs has not a moral tendency to the ſecurity and the proſperity of greatneſs. So far from it, indeed, that the almoſt univerſal ſurprize and indignation which the oppreſſion of virtue in any ſtation occaſions, is a teſtimony that ſuch an event is not only very deteſtable, but very rare.

If the lot of the righteous is fallen in the lower ſphere of life, there is yet little

little probability that he ſhould either be deſtitute himſelf, or that his children ſhould beg their bread. His attention to his duty will make him temperate and induſtrious, and temperance and induſtry are the parents of health and plenty.

" The joy of the righteous continu-
" eth, but the hope of the wicked ſhall
" be deſtroyed."

In this changeable and uncertain ſtate of life, where every ſcheme of happineſs we can form is always liable to be broken; where chance or error may deſtroy the laboured effects of prudence and induſtry; where the faculties of ſenſe and health are expoſed to ruin from the ſlighteſt accident; certainly the only reaſonable and ſatisfactory means of

happineſs muſt be thoſe that are founded on the hopes of piety.

A few hours, or a few days of pain would be tolerable, were we ſupported by the expectation of a certain relief. Such always is the condition of the righteous: Whether he ſuffers the common or the extraordinary evils of life, they are alleviated by the proſpect of a certain, and a happy change; a change which ſhall exempt him from miſery for ever; and, from thoſe pains and ſorrows, which await the condition of mortality, ſhall remove him to the regions of everlaſting reſt—to dwellings where the voice of joy is heard perpetually—where the benevolent Father of nature has prepared eternal happineſs for the righteous, and where he, who ſuffered the afflictions of mortal evil, ſhall, with

that

that affection peculiar to his character, *wipe off all tears from all eyes*, and bid *ſorrow and mourning flee away*.

Deprived of theſe hopes, the great ſupport of the righteous, *where ſhall the ungodly and the ſinner appear?* For it is aſſerted (and we ſhall find the aſſertion is not vain) that *his hope ſhall be deſtroyed*.

Thoſe anxieties and diſtreſſes, which either befall him in the common courſe of things, or have been immediately occaſioned by his own follies and vices, will bear upon him with all their force. —That great relief of human miſery, the proſpect of future happineſs, he is entirely deprived of. As his only agreeable expectations are confined to this life, he can have nothing to ſet againſt its common evils; and they muſt neceſ-

ſarily wound him in his tendereſt attachments.

But when extraordinary calamities attack him; when he finds himſelf involved in hopeleſs misfortunes—what can he do but give himſelf up to unavailing complaint, and mourn over the proſpect of irremediable miſery?

"Lo! this is the man that took not "God for his truſt; but truſted in the "multitude of his riches, and ſtrengthened himſelf in his ungodlineſs."

The evangelical Prophet compares the wicked to "the troubled ſea, which cannot reſt; whoſe waters caſt forth mire "and dirt."—But "the fruits of righteouſneſs," we are told by the Apoſtle, "are peace and joy in believing."

The

The aptneſs and propriety of the Prophet's compariſon are extremely obvious. If we attend to the character and conduct of the wicked, we ſhall find them inconſiſtent, uneaſy, and tumultuous. The hopes that are founded merely on the things of this world moſt frequently terminate in diſappointment: the purſuits of vice are attended with pain and diſguſt: irregular appetites deſtroy the health of the body; and ungoverned paſſions baniſh peace from the mind. How dreadful then muſt be the condition of that wretch, whoſe hopes are fruitleſs, whoſe purſuits are painful, whoſe health is deſtroyed, and whoſe peace is baniſhed!

He, whoſe conduct cannot claim the teſtimony of reaſon, if he looks back upon his paſt life, muſt turn from it,

diſſatisfied with a barren, or diſguſted with a reproachful ſcene. If he looks forward to the future, he is preſented with a proſpect ſtill more diſagreeable; a proſpect which can never be looked upon with indifference, by him who has ſecured no intereſt in the allotments of eternity.

Theſe reflections are ſufficient to embitter even the moments of pleaſure; but they will make their approach at a time when there is nothing to oppoſe or overbear them—in the hour of ſolitude and ſilence! Shall the wicked *then find reſt?* Shall he ſtifle the dictates of conſcience, when every paſſion is languid and uninflamed? Or ſhall he triumph over reaſon by an affected inſenſibility? In vain would he attempt to prove that remorſe and miſery are not the portion of guilt.

But

But *the fruits of righteouſneſs*, we are told by the Apoſtle, *are peace and joy in believing*.

How oppoſite! How unlike is the life of the righteous to that of the wicked! A conſiſtency of ſentiment, and an evenneſs of mind, diſcover themſelves in all the actions of a good man, and peace and tranquillity attend him in every ſcene of life. What pleaſure can be equal to that which his reflections afford him, when a life of conſiſtent virtue preſents itſelf to his view! But when he looks forward to his future ſtate, he then reaps that peace and joy in believing, which the Apoſtle declares to be the fruits of his righteouſneſs.

He, who has a reaſonable proſpect of an intereſt with the Supreme Being, muſt

ſurely conceive the moſt exalted hopes. When he contemplates the glorious attributes of his Maker and Redeemer, his tranſcendent goodneſs, his unbounded power, he may juſtly form the higheſt expectations of that inheritance which ſhall be the portion of the juſt.

Hence *the voice of joy is heard in his dwellings.*

From what has been obſerved, it may be juſtly concluded how much ſuperior the pleaſures of religion are to all worldly enjoyments, ſince thoſe can make even pain and calamity tolerable—how much preferable the life of a good man is, even in this world, to that of the wicked, ſince his piety has not only a final, but a preſent and natural tendency to make him happy.

May, therefore, the Almighty give us grace and wiſdom to avail ourſelves of theſe concluſions!—May he inſpire us with ſuch a ſenſe of his infinite goodneſs, and of his gracious concern for his creatures, that we may rejoice in his ſervice both now and evermore!

SERMON V.

The Folly, Guilt and Miſery of habitual Diſcontent.

LAM. iii. 39.

Wherefore ſhould a living man complain?

DISCONTENT ſeems to have a natural inheritance in ſome minds, and, what ſhould, ſeemingly, be inconſiſtent, they are never ſo much at eaſe, as when they complain. As if they were in love with the miſery whereat they repine, they ſo induſtriouſly cheriſh the remembrance of it, that they refuſe

fuſe even the relief which time and variety would infallibly bring with them. They are for ever contemplating the gloomy ſide of life, and the appearance of joy or pleaſure ſeems to be a kind of diſappointment to them. Whatever wears the aſpect of calamity, though remote from their own concerns, immediately catches their attention; and they faithfully echo the voice of ſorrow, though it be heard from afar. They join in the complaints of miſery, not from any generous or compaſſionate motives, but becauſe ſuch complaints are agreeable to their natural temper, and gratify their inclination to murmur with freſh ſubjects of diſtreſs.

Should a perſon of this temper behold a family on the brink of ruin,

he

he would not feel one emotion of pity for it's approaching miſery, nor, were it in his power, would he contribute to prevent it: Such a prevention would be a diſappointment to him, as it would deprive him of what he always embraces with eagerneſs, a recent occaſion to complain——For he would rather ſee the world itſelf in perpetual miſery, than have no room to murmur at the diſtreſſes of life.

Yet ſurely nothing can be more abſurd than to indulge ſuch a diſpoſition; for the life of man has no miſery ſo great as habitual diſcontent.

Pain and ſickneſs are generally tranſient evils. They are either removed by the return of health, or relieved by intervals

intervals of eaſe, or, at the worſt, are made ſupportable by hope: but a mind habituated to complain, that quarrels with every occurrence of life, and implicitly gives itſelf up to cauſeleſs petulance, or unreaſonable diſguſt, is for ever miſerable.

It is not, indeed, given to man to be entirely free from ſolicitude, nor to paſs through life with invariable tranquillity—Theſe are the privileges of ſuperior beings, who, as they are above the reach of misfortune, are ſtrangers to diſtreſs. It was never intended that we ſhould be entirely free from care, which is, in a moderate degree, neceſſary for the ſupport of a life, doomed, from creation, to ſubſiſt by labour. But whatever exceeds a moderate care

is productive of unhappy conſequences. When the mind is totally taken up with ſecular attentions, and makes the things of this world the *principal* objects of its concern, from the uncertain nature and condition of thoſe things, it muſt neceſſarily meet with many diſappointments, be ſometimes mortified, and frequently perplexed.——Theſe evils gradually lead to habitual diſcontent: the temper grows gloomy, and the ſpirit is diſcompoſed.

To perſuade thoſe who labour under this wretched turn of mind to conſult their own eaſe and happineſs, I would offer the following conſiderations.

I. To be uneaſy under the ſeveral circumſtances and events of human life muſt

muſt proceed from the want of a due confidence in God.

He who is firmly ſatisfied of the infinite care of PROVIDENCE, who acknowledges the juſtice of his diſpenſations, and relies on his regard for his creatures, however inconvenient his lot, in the preſent diſpoſition of things, may appear, will never be dejected at human occurrences. He knows that the all-wiſe Author of the univerſe is beſt able to determine what is neceſſary, or convenient for him; and though his paſſage through life may appear painful or troubleſome, he concludes that it may probably be ſafer than one that was ſmoother and leſs perplexing.—If he is obliged to drink the bitter cup of adverſity, he remembers, with a conſciouſneſs

ſciouſneſs of his own ſafety, how many have been intoxicated with the cup of joy——And, in ſhort, under every circumſtance, he lays hold on this conſolation, that whatever the eye of Providence ſuffers, it muſt be for the beſt.

He, then, who is diſſatisfied with his portion in life, muſt be without a proper ſenſe of the ETERNAL PROVIDENCE; and to be without that ſenſe is a dreadful degree of folly indeed!

Another general cauſe of diſcontent proceeds from over-rating the good things of this life. More than half of mankind entertain miſtaken opinions of thoſe things which they have never poſſeſſed. They look upon the luxury of affluence,

affluence, and the pomp of grandeur as replete with ſome wonderful degree of felicity which they have never enjoyed; but which, however, in the common eſtimate of things, they think themſelves as well entitled to enjoy, as thoſe that poſſeſs them. Dazzled and carried away by ſhining appearances, they never reflect that happineſs is not a ſubſtance but an idea; and that it can no more conſiſt in the advantages of wealth or ſplendor, than the ſoul can conſiſt of the groſs particles of the body. They never conſider how many aching boſoms belong to power and affluence; nor obſerve that theſe are, in general, rather productive of miſery than content. To them they appear to have a thouſand charms; but they are charms which ignorance and novelty alone con-

fer upon them —— ignorance that is blind! and novelty that lives but a day!

It is moſt commonly, indeed, in little and uninformed minds that a habit of repining at more affluent circumſtances finds a place; and, if I might hazard a general obſervation on this ſubject, I would venture to affirm that there is no better argument of the greatneſs or the excellence of any human mind than the happineſs it poſſeſſes. Not to be ſhocked at the great misfortunes of life, nor to be affected when the near connections of the heart are broken, is not expected from man, becauſe it is inconſiſtent with his paſſions and powers; but to repine at every little accident that thwarts our expectations,

or

or ſuits not with our convenience, proves that the mind is fixed on little objects.

II. How unfortunate, nay, how impious, as well as fooliſh, is ſuch a temper as this!

While it renders a man unfit for the pleaſures of ſociety, (which he neither enjoys himſelf, nor ſuffers others to enjoy through his impertinent complaints) it makes him equally diſqualified for the duties of religion: for how ſhould he apply to that God for aſſiſtance or protection, whoſe Providence his complaints either accuſe or deny? what acceptable worſhip can he offer to a being whom he either believes to be unconcerned in the government of the world,

or, if he admits his government, quarrels with his adminiſtration? nay, how, indeed, ſhould he entertain any thoughts of his duty, when his ſecular concerns are too much for his mind?

If we form a right idea of our Creator and ourſelves—If we conſider our ſituation in life as the immediate direction of Providence in the great order of things, we muſt ſurely reflect that to be diſſatisfied with the determinations of the Supreme Wiſdom and Juſtice, muſt be to reproach that wiſdom, and to impeach that juſtice.

But, what! ſhall the creatures of an hour cenſure the wiſe regulations of everlaſting knowledge? ſhall man, who owes his being to the Almighty's goodneſs, and

and the continuance of it to his care, quarrel with his ſacred diſpenſations, and diſtruſt his mercy? Shall a *living* man complain? Is not ſuch a conduct, in the higheſt degree, impious and ungrateful? and is not the divine goodneſs more than ſufficiently vindicated, when thoſe, who thus abuſe it, yet *live* to *complain?* Surely this is a moſt dangerous temper of mind—and thoſe who can acknowledge it to be their own ought to tremble leſt the divine diſpleaſure ſhould take from them that being which they bear about with unthankfulneſs and diſcontent. *God*, indeed, *is ſlow to anger, and of great goodneſs; he knoweth whereof we are made; he remembereth that we are but duſt*—but then, *ſhall the thing formed ſay unto him that formed it, Why haſt thou made me thus?*

Nothing can be more convincing than the arguments which reaſon affords in ſupport of the great duty of religious reſignation; yet the ſelfiſh and the impious might ſtill, poſſibly, find ſome evaſion, ſome excuſe for their preſumptuous and ungrateful cenſures on Providence, were not that duty indiſpenſibly enjoined in the ſacred writings. —But when we are, there, expreſsly commanded to *be thankful*, to praiſe, for every inſtance of his bounty, our Father who is in heaven, to acknowledge his goodneſs in all his diſpenſations, and to bear thoſe evils which are incident to this life with patience, ſhall we preſume, by the contrary behaviour of cavilling and regret, to tranſgreſs or neglect the divine commands? Every holy motive calls upon us, every reaſonable

able inducement invites us to be humbly grateful, and dutifully reſigned. Whatever our ſituation, or our circumſtances may be, let us remember that he who gave us this life has an everlaſting right to our gratitude for that gift; and that no circumſtances, whatever, of accidental calamity can acquit us of thoſe obligations we have to be thankful to him.

But thankfulneſs and diſcontent can never dwell together. The ſentiments of gratitude ariſe from chearfulneſs and reſignation, and can find no place in a mind that is accuſtomed to complain. To be grateful for any gift, we muſt firſt be pleaſed with it; for few minds are capable of ſuch abſtracted virtue as to retain a laſting gratitude for a favour

which they found troubleſome or inconvenient.

It is impoſſible for any man who is diſcontented with himſelf to be contented with his God: it is impoſſible that, with any other than a mere mock-worſhip, he ſhould offer his thanks to the ſupreme Providence for *his creation, his preſervation, and all the bleſſings* of a life, which his gloomy diſpoſition made him look upon as a curſe.

Such was the guilt which of old, attended thoſe that *murmured, and were deſtroyed of the deſtroyer.* A guilt which, in this, as well as in all other caſes, is accompanied with miſery.

III. If we regarded only the happineſs of this life, we ſhould find that the reſignation

reſignation which is expected from us as an act of piety, would prove the means of comfort—If there are a thouſand poſſible accidents which no prudence can guard againſt, no ſagacity foreſee, ſhall we mourn what it was not in our power to obviate, and what human wiſdom could not avoid? To be over ſolicitous about events which we cannot command—to be diſſatisfied with occurrences which anſwer not the luxury of expectation, nor the predictions of ſanguine hope——what is it but to involve ourſelves in needleſs anxiety and avoidable diſtreſs?

A mind accuſtomed to complain, eternally apprehenſive of new diſappointments, and the various diſtreſſes which in the wide field of poſſibility may come

to

to paſs, can never be at eaſe. Every new day will bring nearer ſome proſpect of miſery, and every hour diſguſt with ſome diſagreeable circumſtance, or ſome trivial inconvenience; 'till the mind, by long murmuring, acquire an habitual gloomineſs, and life itſelf become one horrid ſcene either of real, or imaginary evils.

That this terrible condition may never be ours, let us avail ourſelves of every argument that reaſon or religion ſuggeſt againſt it. Let us conſider what has been already obſerved, that to repine at the events of life proceeds from a miſtaken idea of Providence, and the want of a due confidence in its care—that only by over rating what are called the good things of this world, we look upon our-

ſelves as hardly uſed in the diſtribution of them—that diſcontent muſt be no inferior degree of guilt, as it is not only a diſparagement of the care of Providence, but repugnant to his expreſs commands—and, laſtly, that habitual murmuring is not the way to alleviate, but to aggravate affliction.

If theſe conſiderations had their due weight, ſurely little more would be neceſſary to perſuade gloomy ſorrow to ſeek it's happineſs in reſignation.

To add to the force of theſe arguments, let it be conſidered by the *careful about many things*, that, if future good is the object of their ſolicitude, *to fear God and to keep his commandments* is the way to obtain it without diſappointment, perfect and eternal.—That, if preſent afflictions

afflictions are the cauſe of their complaint, to endure them with patience, as it is the duty of a Chriſtian, ſo it is the only means of making them more ſupportable.

God for ever grant that under no circumſtances we may depart from our duty, that we may bear every event of life as becometh dependent creatures, and *ſo paſs through things temporal, that we finally loſe not the things eternal.*

SERMON VI.

Paraphraſe and Reflections on the Story of Joſeph.

GEN. xlv. 4.

I am Joſeph your Brother, whom ye ſold into Egypt.

THERE is no ſtory in the ſacred writings in which the heart has ſo much to do as that of Joſeph. Pride, envy, ſurprize, affection, fear, hope, and joy have their ſeveral turns, and, as we read, ſtrike upon the attention, or excite the paſſions.

Joſeph

Joſeph was one of the younger children of Jacob, and indulged with thoſe particular forbearances and endearments, which are always due to the tendereſt years—— Theſe little diſtinctions of his father's love were, however, the ſource of many miſeries to him; and they leave an uſeful leſſon to all parents, to beware leſt they ſow the ſeeds of jealouſy in the hearts of brothers.

Envious of Joſeph's ſuperior favour and privileges, his brethren had long looked upon him with diſguſt, 'till, at laſt, an unfortunate circumſtance turned their jealouſy into rancour. The innocent and unwary youth inadvertently told them that, in a dream he beheld their ſheaves *making obeiſance* to his. "What! my officious favourite, ſurely

"this

" this is too much: Your ſmooth tales,
" and your prattling careſſes have
" caught the heart and the ear of your
" unthinking father—but to grow vain
" upon your diſtinction, young man!—
" to add inſult to treachery!—not con-
" tented with robbing your brethren of
" a father's favour, would you alſo de-
" prive them of their liberty? And do
" you expect that thoſe who are your
" ſuperiors by birth and age, ſhould
" bow like ſlaves to you?"

How ſpecious are ſuch reproaches as theſe, and what an air of equity and reaſon do they aſſume! It is the peculiar misfortune of innocence, that it makes us too inattentive to the conſequences of our common actions: And while we never ſuſpect that the world has

has any other deſigns or ſentiments than ſuch as paſs in our own breaſts, we find that the moſt trivial circumſtances of our conduct, many times, become a ſnare to us. Unhappy Joſeph! Poor unexperienced boy! Little didſt thou think that the innocent recital of thy dream ſhould draw upon thee ſo much obloquy, ſo much envy! Behold! Unapprehenſive of the rage that was already kindled againſt him, he unwarily lets fall another circumſtance which blows it up to the utmoſt fury. I dreamed, ſays he, (with the ſame undeſigning innocence) Behold! I have had one dream more; and *the ſun, the moon, and eleven ſtars did reverence to me.*

Envy, when inflamed to the utmoſt, vents not itſelf in idle reproaches, but plots,

plots, in horrid ſilence, the ruin of it's object.

The unnatural brethren now no longer threatened or reviled; but at once determined to ſacrifice a life ſo obnoxious to their pride. The ſcene of this ſhocking reſolution was the field of Dothan, where they were keeping ſheep, a ſcene of paſtoral ſimplicity, but not of paſtoral innocence. There Joſeph came to ſeek his brethren. Tell me, ſaid the affectionate youth to a ſtranger in the way, haſt thou ſeen my brethren? Behold I am wandering in theſe lonely fields to ſeek them; tell me, I pray thee, where they keep their ſheep. They have left the fields of Schechem, replied the ſtranger, and are gone to Dothan; there wilt thou find them.

Probably this was ſome more retired place, ſome darker and remoter deſart, in which they choſe to execute their horrid purpoſe.

"He comes, they cried, he comes. "Behold the dreamer! Now vain boy! "Thou ſhalt now ſuffer for thy pride, "thy inſolence, and thoſe coaxing arts "thou haſt made uſe of to ſeduce the "ear of thy father; that ear is now too "far off to hear thy complaints, neither "ſhall they abuſe it any more. Come, "let us ſlay him, and throw him into a "pit: we ſhall ſay ſome wild beaſt hath "devoured him."

Thus had the unhappy youth fallen a ſacrifice to the envy and the jealouſy of his cruel brethren, but Reuben, the generous, the amiable Reuben interpoſed.

"Hold,

" Hold, raſh men! unnatural and
" unfeeling brothers! Let us not in one
" thoughtleſs moment throw away the
" peace and innocence of our whole
" lives. Good God! how am I aſto-
" niſhed at the horror of your reſolu-
" tion! for the ſake of heaven, before
" your hands are embrued in the blood
" of innocence, a brother's blood! I in-
" treat you, conſider—what is the life
" you are about to take away? A life
" derived from the ſame fountain with
" your own, fed from the ſame breaſt,
" and cheriſhed by the ſame affection!
" But this is not all: You will plunge
" your impious daggers in the Author
" of your being; you will kill your
" venerable father; his children will
" kill their father. No matter how
" you may relate the horrid tale; no

" matter, if his child be ſlain, whether " by ſavage beaſts, or by ſavage bro- " thers; for he will weep, poor man! " He will tear his grey hairs, and " beat his hoary boſom. And are you " yet determined? will you pierce your " *father*'s heart, through the heart of " his child? will you, indeed, fill his " aged eyes with tears? and bring " down his grey hairs with ſorrow to " the grave?—But, if you are deter- " mined, let us not, at leaſt, ſtain our " hands with his blood. Let us rather " *caſt him into this pit that is in the wil-* " *derneſs, and* leave him." *This he ſaid,* continues the ſacred writer, *that he might deliver him out of their hands, and reſtore him to his father.* But here the generous Reuben was diſappointed. He appears to have left his brethren on

ſome

ſome occaſion or other, and they took the opportunity to ſell Joſeph to ſome travelling merchants. For *afterwards, when Reuben returned unto the pit, behold he was not in the pit, and he rent his clothes; and returned to his brethren; and ſaid, The child is not yonder, and I, whither ſhall I go!* Poor youth! what anguiſh muſt his tender heart have felt, when he found his brother taken away, and was ignorant of his fate! No doubt he gave way to all the violence of affectionate grief; for he rent his clothes, crying, "the child is not yonder; and "I, whither ſhall I go? my dear, poor "murdered brother! where ſhall I go "to weep over thy lifeleſs body, to "embrace thy cold limbs, and cloſe thy "eyes!" How affecting is this brotherly ſorrow! But behold a more diſtreſs-

ful ſcene! The venerable Patriarch! an aged and affectionate father mourning for the untimely death of a beloved child! how pitiable is ſuch ſorrow as this! our hearts bleed within us while we think of it. "Yes (complains the father to his ungracious children) "I "perceive too well the cauſe of my "child's death. Some evil beaſt hath "devoured him. Yes, my child, this "was thy little coat of divers colours "which thy mother's fondneſs provided "—Ah! little did ſhe think that it "ſhould be torn by the bloody teeth "of a ſavage! This coat thy *ſorrowful* "brothers found in the deſart, all rent "and mangled, and bloody as it is. "Joſeph is no more. I *will go down* "*into the grave, to my ſon in mourning.* "*There*, only, my heart can forget it's

"ſorrows,

" ſorrows, and my aged eyes ſhall weep
" no longer."

Let us now change our pity for a moment into indignation.

It is obſervable that vice deſtroys all traces of humanity in the heart.

Theſe inhuman brethren were not in the leaſt concerned for the miſery of their father, provided that their ſtory, however ſhocking to *him*, might effectually cover their own wicked actions. But the hiſtorian tells us they roſe up to comfort him. O ſhameleſs inſult! inſufferable mockery! Ye abandoned hypocrites! How durſt you behold the ſacred ſorrows of your venerable father? Ye! did ye offer your vile, diſſembled

condolence! did ye force the unnatural tear, and put on the appearance of pity! Heaven and earth! can man be ſo *deliberately* baſe?

But enough of this diſagreeable part of the ſtory! Let us haſten forward to a more pleaſing ſcene; and behold the lamented Joſeph, after the ſpace of about twenty years, in poſſeſſion of the higheſt honours of the moſt opulent kingdom in the world.

Inſpired by the ſpirit of immortal wiſdom, from the condition of a ſlave, he became the firſt miniſter of one of the firſt princes upon earth. The keys of power were entruſted to him, and the gardens of Egypt yielded their treaſure into his hand. He whoſe Providence

dence directs the events of nature, who lifteth the poor from his obſcurity, that he may ſet him with princes, diſplayed in this inſtance, in a moſt extraordinary manner, his gracious purpoſes in behalf of ſuffering innocence. Suffer me to paſs over ſome diſagreeable circumſtances that happened to Joſeph, when in Egypt, the trial of his virtue, and his unjuſt impriſonment; perhaps the Almighty Providence might *ſuffer* theſe accidents as the means of his future promotion.

However that might be, it is certain that his God *took him from priſon and from judgment*, that he made *him ſee his ſeed, and prolong his days, and* that the divine *Pleaſure proſpered in his hand.*

But

But behold! The ſame over-ruling Power, who led him ſafe to glory through ſo many perils, is now determined that he ſhall again ſee his brethren.

Before I proceed further upon this event, I beg leave to give you ſome caution againſt a common error concerning the ways of God to man. It is very natural to conclude that the Almighty previouſly appointed all theſe circumſtances in order to bring about the event; that Joſeph's brethren were fatally inſpired with rancour againſt him, that they might ſell him into Egypt; and that a general famine was the neceſſary and fore-appointed means of their ſeeing him there. On which I ſhall obſerve, in one word; that "God cannot be the author "of evil," but that to bring good out of

of evil, is conſiſtent both with his gracious diſpoſition, and with his moral government of the world.

I will now lead you, without further delay, to a very affecting ſcene, to the meeting of Joſeph and his brethren.

At firſt, ſays the ſacred writer, though he knew them, yet he ſpake roughly to them; and ſaid, "Ye are ſpies; to ſee the nakedneſs of the land ye are come." It appears to me, that, as Benjamin was not with his brethren, Joſeph ſuſpected that the youngeſt had ſhared the fate intended for himſelf; and that, through envy, they had ſlain their brother. Elſe why, before he would diſcover himſelf to them, ſhould he ſo much inſiſt upon ſeeing Benjamin? He does abſolutely

inſiſt

inſiſt upon ſeeing him, and retains Simeon as a pledge for his appearance.

But ah! How ſhall they prevail upon their aged father to part with Benjamin? his youngeſt, his beloved Benjamin! "What! cried the venerable man, "would ye rob me of this child too? "Joſeph is not, and Simeon is not, and "ye will take Benjamin away. All theſe "things are againſt me."

The generous Reuben again interpoſed, "Slay my two ſons if I bring him "not unto thee; deliver him into my "hand, and I will bring him to thee "again."—"My ſon ſhall not go "down," replied the impatient father; "his brother is dead, and if death too "ſhould befal him in the way, ye ſhall "bring

" bring down my grey hairs with ſor-
" row to the grave."

Neceſſity, however, ſtronger than all human affections, prevailed where other arguments were ineffectual. The brethren are again ſent to buy food, and the fond father gives up his darling child, the laſt hope and comfort of his age.

But what language ſhall paint the inexpreſſible affection of Joſeph, upon the ſight of Benjamin? When he ſaw him, his heart ſwelled within him, the tears of fondneſs ſprung into his eyes, and he retired to indulge them.

Do not you hear this affectionate brother thus giving a looſe to the fulneſs of his heart? " Great God of Jacob!
" what

" what a ſcene haſt thou brought be-
" fore me! my eyes have again beheld
" my brethren, ſtrangers to me more
" than twenty years!—Dear, unhappy
" men! indeed my heart forgives you—
" How do I long to diſcover myſelf to
" you, but that you would die with
" ſhame at the ſight of your injured
" brother. None of you could rejoice
" at ſuch a diſcovery, ſave Benjamin—
" he, amiable innocence! he entered
" not into your horrid conſpiracy. But
" I muſt think of ſome means to free
" you from the diſagreeable impreſſions
" of ſhame, when I make myſelf known
" to you; and endeavour to heighten
" your joy on that occaſion, by firſt
" alarming your fears."

Such probably was the generous deſign of Joſeph in his ſcheme for retaining

ing Benjamin—Such certainly was the effect that it had, when under the terrible apprehenſion of returning to their incenſed father, with an account that they had left his youngeſt child a bond-ſlave, they were ſtruck with this important, this aſtoniſhing diſcovery—"I am "Joſeph your brother, whom ye ſold "into Egypt."

I ſhall not dwell upon this ſcene. It is too great for deſcription——But the heart of every brother and every father may conceive it.

Moſt of the inſtructive reflections that ariſe from this affecting ſtory, I have interwoven with the thread of it. But you will accept of one general obſervation from the whole.

Whatever

Whatever diſtreſsful circumſtances may befal you, always remember that you are under the eye of a benevolent and almighty Providence, who is able to bring good out of evil, and who is continually concerned for the happineſs of his creatures. From this conviction, you will endeavour to engage his particular regard by the exerciſe of that virtue he is moſt in love with.

Be kindly affectioned one to another.

SERMON VII.

I. The Reaſonableneſs of religious Duty.

II. The Utility of Prayer.

JOB xxi. 15.

What is the Almighty that we ſhould ſerve him? Or what Profit ſhall we have if we pray unto him?

A Very intereſting Enquiry indeed! But here it ſeems to be offered only as the inſult of abandoned profligacy, which had previouſly ſaid unto the Almighty, *depart from me, for I deſire not*

the knowledge of thy ways.——Many ſuch enquirers there are, who put the queſtion, not from a deſire of information, but from a ſpirit of inſolence; and *anſwer themſelves according to their folly.*

It is not in anſwer to ſuch as theſe, then, that I mean to diſcuſs the queſtions before us; nor ſhall I, on this occaſion, fight againſt the prejudice of infidelity, which, in my opinion, ſtands more in need of prayers than of preaching—*Infidelity* and her friends have generally connections too ſtrong to be overborne by truth, and too intereſting to be broken by any power, but that whoſe exiſtence they affect to diſbelieve. Yet, is it poſſible? You will ſay—can the connections of *Infidelity* be intereſting? For, *what is*

ſhe *that men ſhould ſerve* her? And *what profit ſhall* they *have if they pray unto* her? Is *length of days in her right hand?* Are *riches and honours in her left?* Are *her ways* unexceptionably *ways of pleaſantneſs?* And are ALL her paths peace? Thoſe circumſtances, perhaps, may not be quite ſo clear, yet *infidelity* muſt be allowed to have her advantages: For, is it not hers to ſoothe the alarming terrors of conſcience?—to encourage vice with the hopes of impunity?—and to promiſe that, at laſt it ſhall periſh in non-exiſtence? Is the Chriſtian ſteady in his principles? And is not the infidel obſtinately ſteady? Have the diſciples of Jeſus embraced their religion even in tortures and in death? And has not *infidelity* likewiſe had her martyrs, voluntary martyrs?! It may perhaps be ſuggeſted

that her friends diſpatch themſelves, becauſe they cannot bear the horrid delays of a natural death, and are apt to ſhrink from their fortitude, if they make a gradual approach to the grave——It may be ſo ſuggeſted, I ſay—and, poſſibly, the ſuggeſtion may be true; but, for the preſent, let us drop the ſubject.

To enquire by what obligations we are bound to ſerve the Almighty, and to ſet forth thoſe advantages which may be derived from prayer, I am naturally led by the order of the queſtions before us—*What is the Almighty that we ſhould ſerve him? Or what profit ſhall we have if we pray unto him?*

I. With reſpect to that part of the queſtion—what is the Supreme Being?

We

We muſt indeed acknowledge, that *touching the Almighty, we cannot find him out.* The mode of exiſtence peculiar to a being that is infinite in all his capacities, finite creatures can neither know nor conceive. From what he has been pleaſed to communicate of himſelf, we may conclude that he is an all-powerful, all-intelligent Being, neceſſarily exiſting from all eternity—that he is, as it were, the diffuſive ſoul of nature, who formed the world, and actuates what he has formed;—that he is, therefore, every where preſent, and the univerſal ſource and ſupport of life.

But the queſtion here is, more immediately, what is the relation which man, in particular, bears to the Almighty *that he ſhould ſerve him?* What obligations

has he to do him ſervice? Or what hopes are annexed to his ſervices?

The divine obligations which man lies under are, firſt and principally, thoſe of a creature to its creator. Theſe obligations commence with his exiſtence, and no time, or ſervices can acquit him of them. As long as he continues to enjoy that inſtance of the divine bounty, the uſe of a living and a thinking being, ſo long neceſſarily muſt he be bound by duty to the giver of ſo good a gift—Nor, when the motives that muſt have induced the creator of the univerſe to call him into exiſtence, are conſidered, will theſe obligations appear to have leſs weight: For, what could thoſe motives be but the original principles of infinite goodneſs, willing to communicate the happi-

happineſs of conſcious life?——to give that pleaſure which ariſes from the power of motion and ſenſibility, and which we may ſuppoſe to exiſt in the higheſt degree in his own perfect nature, in a proportionable meaſure to beings leſs perfect? Hence, through the whole ſcale of animal life, we obſerve that every creature is ſupplied with faculties capable of conveying to it all the happineſs of which its nature can partake.

Thus thoſe creatures, that have not the power of reflection, are not ſtruck with the magnificence of the univerſe, nor with the ſymmetry and order of its ſeveral parts; yet many of them have organs ſo peculiarly adapted to animal ſenſation, that it affords them the moſt

exquiſite delight: and if we look through the entire ſyſtem of created beings, we ſhall find that each has ſome diſtinguiſhed advantage which may, in their ſtation, be equivalent to thoſe higher privileges which different and ſuperior natures ſeem to enjoy. The ſtag which is not endowed with the ſtrength or ſagacity of the elephant, excels him proportionably in ſwiftneſs, in which he finds both pleaſure and ſecurity——The nightingale which cannot boaſt the ſtrength of wing, or rapidity of the eagle—which cannot, like him exult, in cutting the midway-ſky, or darting from region to region without the fear of a foe, yet finds that ſecurity which *he* places in his ſtrength, in the impenetrable thicket, and enjoys the pleaſures of her ſoothing ſong when *he* is oppreſſed with ſleep.

In

In ſhort, to whatever part of nature we carry our obſervations, we muſt ſtill conclude that from motives of benevolence alone, and the deſire of communicating happineſs, the Almighty Creator was induced to eſtabliſh that variety of animal life, with which the ſeveral elements are ſo abundantly ſupplied.

But in man, ſurely, in man his goodneſs ſhines with moſt diſtinguiſhed luſtre. Whether we conſider the faculties of the mind, or the organs of the body; whether we reflect on the exquiſite powers of the ſenſes, or on the objects provided for the gratification of thoſe powers; whether we attend to the delights of memory, the amuſements of fancy, or the directive power of reaſon;——muſt we not acknowledge the viſible effects of the

the divine bounty? But in the whole courſe of life, as well as in the gift of that life, and of the faculties peculiar to it, do we not experience the continual care and attention of the ſame benevolent Providence? He muſt, indeed, be a very unſkilful obſerver who does not perceive that the viſible creation is the work of a very wiſe and gracious Being; but he who does not acknowledge the care of Providence in the particular circumſtances of his own life, muſt have been negligent rather from ingratitude than from ignorance.

Such, then, are the obligations by which man is perpetually bound to ſerve his Creator. As he owes his life to the Almighty goodneſs, and the preſervation of it to his providential care, the

the ſervice of that life becomes invariably due to him, and the religious duty of man is originally founded in gratitude.

Upon this principle alone our obedience would be due to every law that the Supreme Being ſhould appoint us—But when we reflect that by the ſame benevolent motives, from which he brought us into life, he was actuated likewiſe, in giving us rules for the conduct of that life, a new obligation will be found to ariſe from thence, which muſt render our neglect of that obedience, which is expected from us, ſtill more criminal: For, if we refuſe to obey thoſe precepts which were evidently intended by the divine wiſdom to enſure our happineſs, we offend at the ſame time againſt God and againſt ourſelves—we are not only ungrateful

for

for the paſt favours of Providence, but perverſely refuſe the preſent, while we reject thoſe bleſſings that are inſeparably annexed to the diſcharge of our religious duty.

By thoſe bleſſings I do not mean thoſe divine promiſes which reſpect futurity, but that happineſs which is the immediate reſult of a religious conduct; and which a due obedience to the divine laws infallibly produces.

However, if it ſhould yet be aſked, *what is the Almighty that we ſhould ſerve him?* Another, and ſurely not the leaſt powerful reaſon may be found in the hopes of futurity.

Thoſe immortal promiſes of an exiſtence invariably happy, and endleſs in

in its duration, which await the due performance of the duties enjoined us, have a claim to more difficult, and more laborious ſervices, than any that the divine laws have appointed us. Nay, ſo tranſcendently great are the hopes which are founded on Chriſtianity, that the ſervices of the Son of God himſelf alone were able to procure them for us. After theſe conſiderations can it any more be aſked, *what is the Almighty that we ſhould ſerve him?* Or will any one, after thus reflecting on the goodneſs and the promiſes of God, aſk *what profit we ſhall have if we pray unto him?*

II. Should this yet remain a queſtion, I would anſwer in the words of him in whoſe name we pray:

"If a ſon ſhould aſk bread of any of "you that is a father, would he give "him a ſtone; or, would he for an "egg, give him a ſerpent? If ye, then, "being evil, know how to give good "gifts unto your children, how much "more ſhall our heavenly Father to "them that aſk him?"

That bleſſed Saviour has given us the ſtrongeſt aſſurances, that whatever we aſk in his name it ſhall be granted, that our prayers ſhall always meet with a moſt gracious acceptance, and our deſires be complied with, ſo far as they are conſiſtent with our own happineſs—Our Father, who is in heaven, is ever more ready to hear than we to pray, and is wont to give more than we can either deſire or deſerve.

Is it not then our greateſt happineſs that we have ſo beneficent a parent, in whoſe wiſdom, goodneſs and power, we have an unfailing reſource—who knows our neceſſities before we aſk, and prevents our ignorance in aſking?——To this gracious Being we may apply ourſelves under all the various exigencies of life, and, *believing, we ſhall receive.*

The advantages of prayer are evidently great: For, is it not by this means that we lay open our wants to our Almighty Father, and implore the continuance of his care and protection? When we retire from the cares and attentions of the day, do not we by this ſeek forgiveneſs of thoſe human infirmities from which no circumſpection can ſecure us?——Do not we engage

the

the divine aſſiſtance againſt future temptations?——and recommend ourſelves to the care of that watchful Providence, whoſe eye can pierce through the nether darkneſs?——Again, when we riſe from a ſtate of inſenſibility to reſume the employments of life, do not we by this means ſolicit the protection of the Almighty, and commit our ſafety to his gracious care?

Prayer, excluſive of every other advantage, is itſelf a great preſervative from ſin; for it would be abſurd to ſuppoſe we ſhould addreſs that Being for his favour, to whoſe laws we paid not a due obedience.

Let, then, the advantages of prayer be the greateſt imaginable, they can only be ſo to the righteous. *The praying*

ing of the wicked is an abomination to the Lord: It is even an inſult on his knowledge, and a defiance of his power. The prayer of penitence, however, muſt be excepted: for that, as a forgiving and a compaſſionate Father, he is ever ready to receive.

Can the utility of prayer, then, any longer be doubted?——Lives there a good man that would be deprived of this comfortable, this ineſtimable privilege? Is there even a wicked man who could bear to be informed, that he ſhould never be permitted to addreſs his offended God?——The piety of the firſt would languiſh, unaſſiſted and unenlightened by this divine intercourſe—The wretched ſituation of the laſt would involve him in deſpair, when

deprived of all attainable means of reconciliation.

May we evermore avail ourſelves of theſe reflections, and offer up our prayers in an acceptable time!

SERMON VIII.

The Danger of a falſe Confidence in Religion.

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1 COR. X. 12.

Let him that thinketh he ſtandeth take heed leſt he fall.

PERHAPS there is nothing more dangerous in the great buſineſs of our ſalvation than a miſtaken confidence.

He who goes on in an uninterrupted courſe of wickedneſs, and hardens himſelf in the purſuit of conſcious villainy, is, indeed, to all appearance, in a wretch-

ed ſituation—Yet his condition, however dangerous, is not deſperate: The repeated efforts of conſcience may awake him to ſenſibility; ſickneſs or misfortune may break the way for reaſon; the ſenſe of preſent calamities may ſubdue, or the proſpect of future puniſhment alarm him.——But what ſhall convince that man of his danger, who thinks himſelf already ſecure?—who believes that his conduct is agreeable to his duty, and that *his feet are in the way which leadeth to life?* It would be vain to point out a precipice to the traveller who can ſee nothing but an even proſpect, or to warn the pilot of a rock, who purſues his paſſage with invincible confidence.

Yet as the traveller may ſometimes be deceived by his eye, and as the pilot may be

be miſled by his chart, ſo it is poſſible for a man, in his journey from this world to the next, to be miſtaken when he thinks himſelf in the right path, and to wander far from *the narrow way that leadeth to life.*

I would therefore, upon this occaſion, endeavour to point out ſome of the moſt prevailing cauſes of a falſe confidence in religion, to diſcover thoſe means by which the heart is flattered into a miſtaken ſecurity, and to enquire upon what grounds we may entertain a reaſonable hope of our ſalvation.

I. To diſcover all the cauſes of religious ſecurity would, indeed, be too hard a taſk—a taſk to which HIS powers alone are adequate, who can trace the

human heart through all its receſſes; who can perceive the principles of action, however ſpeciouſly dreſt, and read the language of the ſoul in every character.

It muſt be in the laſt degree difficult to judge of the motives by which others are conducted, ſince we are ſometimes ſo far deceived in ourſelves, as to miſtake the principles of our own actions.

But admitting the impoſſibility of finding out all the means by which men are flattered into a miſtaken confidence in religion, ſome of them are nevertheleſs ſufficiently obvious.

Amongſt the attributes of the Divine Power, none is more frequently admired,

none

none ſo much attended to as his mercy. We contemplate this perfection of the Godhead, with an intereſting pleaſure—we bleſs the generoſity that is induſtrious in the diſpenſation of unmerited favours, and adore that benevolence which ſupports our weakneſs and bears with our frailties—And with reaſon we adore—But while we hourly experience the divine Goodneſs, and conſtantly rely upon it—when, notwithſtanding our follies and our errors, we find ourſelves ſupported by the Supreme Benevolence, we are apt to forget that there are faults which the clemency of heaven cannot connive at, and that there is a conduct which infinite mercy, conſiſtently with juſtice and wiſdom, cannot accept—what we ought to look upon only as the forbearance of that gracious Being, *who is not willing*

that any ſhould periſh, we conclude to be an invariable principle of mercy, that will exert itſelf in producing the ſame effects for ever. Upon this miſtaken concluſion, not only he, who expects ſalvation on his own terms, builds his hopes, but he who has no other view than the uninterrupted purſuit of wickedneſs, founds his daring confidence.

"Becauſe ſentence againſt an evil "work is not executed ſpeedily, there-"fore are the hearts of the children of "men fully ſet in them to do evil."

Another ſpecies of falſe ſecurity, and not leſs prevalent than that which has been already mentioned, ariſes from a partial obedience. It is in the duties of religion, as in the buſineſs of the world; we

we are willing to obtain what we want with as little trouble as poſſible; and indulge a deſire equally vain and unreaſonable, to enjoy, at the ſame time, the pleaſures of idleneſs, and the rewards of induſtry*—Yet not indolence alone, not merely an unwillingneſs to undergo the active labours of religion makes us content ourſelves with a partial performance of our duty—we have generally ſome favourite paſſion to indulge, which is not altogether conſiſtent with the ſtrict precepts of chriſtianity; and, like the ſimple Aſſyrian, who begged that, when he accompanied his maſter to the worſhip of his gods, he might be permitted at leaſt to bow the knee to RIMMON, we

* Næ illi falſi ſunt qui res diverſiſſimas pariter expectant, ignaviæ voluptatem & præmia virtutis. SALLUST.

reſerve

reſerve an indulgence for our favourite foible—we reſerve it, I ſay, and we exerciſe it, frequently, without the Aſſyrian's modeſty, or ſo much as ſaying, "Lord pardon thy ſervant in this thing."

Hence it is that, with Agrippa, men are almoſt perſuaded to be Chriſtians. They would ſettle their portion of duty with heaven, and ſomething, at leaſt, would they do to be ſaved. They will give up part of their time, I had almoſt ſaid, part of their thoughts too to the buſineſs of religion, and the ſervice of God; but no ſooner are the formal moments over than they return, with an ardor which diſcovers their pleaſure in the change, to their ſchemes of intereſt or amuſement. They are willing, or rather their fear makes them think it

neceſſary

neceſſary to embark in the ſervice of religion, but, ſuch is their attachment to the earth on which they grew, they only coaſt along—they have not ſpirit enough to venture out to ſea, nor fortitude to leave the ſhades, and the flowers of the ſhore.

We are, indeed, all various and uncertain creatures, and it is not, therefore, to be wondered, if we want reſolution to execute even the moſt important things. In our early years we are very inconſtant. We determine in the ardor of exulting ſpirits, without conſidering either the difficulty of the proceſs, or the remoteneſs of the event. If we caſually, think of religion, we form ſchemes for a life of piety and devotion, in conſequence of a ſudden impulſe, or a tranſitory

tory rapture. We reſolve, without reflecting that our reſolutions are the effect of accidental circumſtances—they live awhile, and an accident deſtroys them.

Thus, the inſtruments of chance and paſſion, we advance towards the maturity of life—The levity of youth may *then* poſſibly ſubſide; but we are *then* only a medley of the ſeveral habits we had contracted, and the paſſions ſtill maintain their dominion, though their objects may be changed.—It rarely happens, however, that religion has any intereſt in the change; for, as it had ſeldom engaged our attention in youth, ſo it ſtill remains but an inferior conſideration, and, among the multitude of different engagements, can ſcarcely obtain it's ſeventh day.

Divided

Divided thus between God and the world, but more, far more, I fear, attached to the latter, we paſs through this ſtate of life; in youth borne away on the unreſiſted tide of the paſſions, we cannot judge with the freedom of unbiaſſed reaſon; that only is right which flatters the ruling appetite, and the confidence of laſting happineſs is founded on a tranſient inclination.

In age, indeed, that is ſeldom the caſe. We have then learned from frequent diſappointment that nothing in this world deſerves the name of happineſs; and from thence we draw this unavoidable concluſion that it is only to be ſought in the hopes of another. Of another we have often heard, and of another we have ſometimes thought. We have

have ſome confuſed idea that general acts of obedience will qualify us for the attainment of *that* happineſs, which is promiſed only to uniform piety, or ſincere repentance. To uniform piety we cannot even have any pretence, and repentance is but a melancholy work, which we would, by any means, endeavour to diſpenſe with. On acts of general obedience, therefore, we are dangerouſly contented to found our hopes of futurity. Still attached to the world, its vanities, and its follies, we ſatisfy ourſelves with a preſumptuous expectation, that the Almighty will be pleaſed with occaſional ſervices, and curſory acts of duty.

But is it, indeed, true that God will be ſerved in part? Is it not the heart, the

the *devoted* heart, that he requires from us? Is it not he that ſaith, GIVE ME THY HEART, MY SON?—Will then a partial obedience avail us? Shall there be any variety of intereſts in his ſervice?—With reſpect to that part of our duty which relates to him, what is the commandment that we have received?

"Thou ſhalt love the Lord thy God "with all thy heart, and with all thy "ſoul; with all thy mind, and with all "thy ſtrength."

Nay we are told, expreſsly, that it is impoſſible for us to ſerve God and the world. The author of our religion himſelf has given us ſufficient information as to this point. He has aſſured us that our ſervices cannot be divided——that

if

if our hearts incline towards the world, we are ſervants of the world; if towards God, we are ſervants of God. In ſhort, *his ſervants we are, whom we obey.*—

May theſe obſervations be well conſidered by thoſe who entertain the dangerous and deluſive expectation, that their God will accept of an obedience which flows not from the heart, and thoſe ſervices they tender him rather through fear than love!

As for thoſe whoſe miſtaken confidence is founded on an opinion that the SUPREME MERCY either cannot be offended, or can indiſcriminately forgive, I muſt beg their attention to the following conſiderations.

The

The goodneſs of the DIVINE POWER, however extenſive, cannot act in oppoſition to his juſtice or his truth. Every attribute of the SUPREME PERFECTION muſt be perfect. Juſtice and truth are his eſſential attributes; his juſtice and his truth, therefore, muſt be perfect.

If we conſult his revealed will, with reſpect to his juſtice, we ſhall be informed, that *he will reward every man according to his works*;—that *he is righteous in all his ways*—and that *the judge of all the earth will do right.*

With reſpect to his veracity, we are told, that *God is not a man that he ſhould lie, nor the ſon of man that he ſhould repent*, or, as it may be more intelligibly rendered, *that he ſhould change his mind.*

It is evident, therefore, that however great the ſupreme mercy may be, his declarations muſt, in conſequence of his truth, be accompliſhed, and that *he will judge the world in righteouſneſs.*

I would not here be thought inclinable to impreſs a terror of the divine Power upon you by repreſenting his Mercy as leſs than it really is, or his Juſtice as more rigid—That, as a man, I ſhould have little inclination to do—God knows I have more need of his mercies than my fellow-creatures.—As a preacher of the goſpel I ſhould have ſtill leſs: But let me intreat you to conſider, that though the Almighty were merciful beyond all puniſhment or retribution, would not the very argument on which you build your hopes of

of impunity make you appear ſhocking to all ſenſe of natural or moral excellence? Should not that man be looked upon as a monſter who would offend againſt mercy becauſe he knew it would forgive, and trample on clemency from an aſſurance, that it would not reſent?

If then the folly and danger of a falſe confidence in religion be ſo frequent and ſo obvious, it muſt be worth our while to enquire upon what grounds we may entertain a reaſonable hope of our ſalvation.

II. Let us remember that man does not now ſtand in the ſame relation to God as at his creation! that he is to look upon his Creator as an offended

Being, whoſe laws he has broken, and to whom he can only be reconciled through the mediation of Jeſus Chriſt—that the Mediator has introduced a ſyſtem of duties, by complying with which alone we ſhall be entitled to the advantage of that redemption which he purchaſed by his death: For, though *he came not to call the righteous, but ſinners to repentance*, yet that very repentance is a qualifying act of duty, and the firſt fruits of thoſe good works, without which his merits with THE FATHER will not avail us.

In ſhort, if we obey his laws; if we imitate his life; if we believe his doctrines; if we embrace his precepts; and, laſtly, if we look up to him as our greateſt good, as the object of our affections

fections and the perfect pattern of our conduct, we may then hope that he will receive us to his mercy, and interpose his services for our frailties, and our sins.

SERMON IX.

Affection, Compaſſion, and Civility recommended.

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1 PET. iii. 8.

Love as brethren; be pitiful, be courteous.

THAT charitable diſpoſition which Chriſtianity recommends as it's firſt principle, comprehends all the peculiar graces and virtues that diſtinguiſh the diſciples of Jeſus.

Hence,

Hence, the Apoſtle gives it the preference to all other faculties and powers. The mind might be enlightened with the viſions of prophecy——The tongue might be informed with every human language——The laws of nature might be inverted at the command of a created Being, and health and life conferred by man that is born to die: But theſe powers, as they were ſuperior to his capacity, could add nothing to his moral excellence; and, therefore, one portion of charity was greater than theſe.

It does not appear that the apoſtles looked upon this as any particular ſpecies of virtue, that could be deſcribed by ſome peculiar, or uniform mode of operation: They muſt have conſidered it as a general temper, or diſpoſition of

the ſoul, that gave its colour and principle to every moral action.

This temper was formed by the genius and ſpirit of Chriſtianity, improved by that divine grace, which was the privilege of the new religion—— But why am I attempting a deſcription of charity, which is ſo admirably deſcribed by it's effects in the epiſtle to the *Corinthians?*—— To that I ſhall refer you, and confine myſelf to the conſideration of thoſe virtues that flow from it, mentioned in the text—— *Love as brethren: Be pitiful: Be courteous.*

I. It muſt always be allowed by the advocates of natural religion, that the precepts of Chriſtianity make the beſt ſyſtem

ſyſtem of morality in the world. Numberleſs graces were ſuggeſted by the divine Spirit, which would never have been thought of in a mere natural ſtate: None of theſe is more frequently inculcated than brotherly love; nay, ſo indiſpenſible was this duty, that it was made the teſt of every convert's pretenſions, and the laſt argument of the love of God. *By this we know that ye are of God, if ye have love one to another.*

And, indeed, what better proof could there be of a principle of grace in the heart than this *love of the brethren?* What better indication that they were actuated by the ſpirit of him who is love itſelf? What could more effectually preſerve the infant church from the rending fury of ſects and ſchiſms, than this

this harmony of affections, this union of minds? So ſtrictly requiſite then, that it was made the teſt of the true Chriſtian.

But was it neceſſary in the early ſtate of Chriſtianity, and is it not equally ſo now? Stands not our holy church in need of the ſpirit of unanimity and love, when we ſee the bigot zeal of popery ſo induſtrious on the one hand, and the deluſions of fanaticiſm ſo ſucceſsful on the other? Were ever the ſacred connections of mutual amity more neceſſary in the church of *England* than at the preſent time? In what pariſh, nay in what village have not ſome of her wavering members been deceived by the inſinuations of the puritan or the bigot? Have not we ſeen the labours of theſe men too

ſucceſsful

ſucceſsful in creating prejudice and diviſions? And is not this in ſome meaſure owing to the want of brotherly affection, *the unity of the ſpirit in the bond of peace?* Were this more effectually cultivated among us, the good ſhepherd would ſee fewer ſtragglers from his fold.

So neceſſary is this principle of uniting love in the ſupport of religion; nor is it leſs valuable, or leſs needful in ſocial life: Mutual affection is not only the beſt proof of piety, and the principal ſecurity from innovations in religion; but the pureſt ſource of ſocial duties, and the firmeſt foundation of moral juſtice.

Were every man to conſider himſelf as deriving his exiſtence from one common parent,

parent, as connected to the whole ſpecies by an eternal relation, and, in conſequence of this reflection, to behave to every fellow-creature as a brother, would not the ſecond great commandment of the law be moſt emphatically fulfilled? And would it not, at the ſame time, moſt effectually promote the welfare of ſociety? Would not the life and property of every individual be infinitely the moſt ſecure, when from the law of nature, as well as of nations, from the connections of relation, as well as the obligations of moral rectitude, he could claim the aſſiſtance and regard of others?

To love as brethren, muſt, in the conſequence, be to act as brethren——No perſon of humanity would willingly ſee him who derived his being from the ſame parents,

parents, the partner of the ſame womb, whom the ſame affections nurſed, for whom the ſame care provided, in miſery or diſtreſs. The voice of nature would plead for the wretched, and demand the relief and aſſiſtance of a brother. Should the ſame voice point out every individual to our regard, when would juſtice bewail the violation of her laws, or miſery complain without aſſiſtance and redreſs? Should we conſider every fellow-creature as relatively, though not abſolutely, a brother, how happy muſt be the effect of ſuch a concluſion! What peace and harmony would run through the ſyſtem of life! How delightful muſt be the effect of univerſal benevolence! Free from the injuries of oppreſſion and the inſolence of pride, the malignity of envy and the extortion of avarice, how very

very different would be the face of ſociety! Should the ſmiles of affection dwell on every aſpect, this life ſhould no longer be called the valley of mourning! Should brotherly love glow in every breaſt, how would it awake every tender paſſion! how ready would pity be to weep over diſtreſs, and pay the ſympathizing tear to pain and miſery!

II. If we *love as brethren*, we ſhall, of conſequence, *be pitiful*. Let ſtoic pride ſhut up the bowels of mercy, and ſtop the ſluices of compaſſion: a Chriſtian will not be aſhamed of the tender ſenſations of humanity, to *mourn with thoſe that mourn*, and *weep with thoſe that weep*—Jeſus wept—The tear that was ſhed over the ſorrows of *Jeruſalem*, the prophetic voice of ſympathy that mourned

ed its approaching ruin, give us a right to indulge a ſenſibility of pity, and teach us that ſuch affections are not unwelcome to heaven.

Nay, we are commanded, as well by the author of our ſalvation as his apoſtles, to be full of compaſſion: It is a duty enjoined by religion, as incumbent on humanity: It is this that directs the hand of charity to relieve, and points out to benevolence the objects of aſſiſtance. Without this charity is oſtentation, and munificence hypocriſy.

Pity brings the mind into an humble frame, and makes it ſuſceptible of the impreſſions of piety and gratitude to the great preſerver of men; when the misfortunes of humanity make us ſenſible

fible of our weakneſs, and of our dependance on that Being who alone is almighty.

The excellence of this affection is demonſtrable in that it is always found in the fineſt diſpoſitions. If pride fill the breaſt with obſtinacy and arrogance, we may be aſſured that pity dwells not there. If avarice turn the ear from the complaints of poverty, we may naturally conclude that pity dwells not there.

He whoſe heart is depraved by the indulgence of irregular appetites, or contracted by unſocial vices, is rarely ſenſible of the emotions of compaſſion. It is almoſt peculiarly the growth of the humble, heavenly mind, that is full of benevolence, tenderneſs and humanity.

It

If we look into the lives of thoſe who have been moſt renowned for their piety, I believe we ſhall find few who have not left behind them ſome extraordinary inſtances, the effects of this generous ſympathy.

Such, indeed, is the excellence of a compaſſionate temper, that perhaps there never was a good man, who was not in a great degree diſtinguiſhed by it.

Its uſefulneſs to ſociety cannot be diſputed: If, as we have obſerved, it be the ſource of charity; if it directs us to the relief of miſery, and the conſolation of diſtreſs; if it be feet *to the lame*, or *eyes to the blind*; if its *words uphold thoſe that are falling*, and if it *ſtrengthen the feeble knees*—its utility is confeſſed; and

it is, with indiſputable propriety, enjoined by the law of religion.

III. Thus neceſſary and thus uſeful is that precept of the Apoſtle, *be pitiful*: Nor leſs uſeful, or leſs neceſſary perhaps is that which immediately follows it, and commands us to *be courteous*—— that is, to behave with civility and complaiſance to all orders of men; and to pay that deference to every man which his ſtation requires. If it were conſidered how much the peace of ſociety is preſerved by the forms of what we call good breeding, they would not haſtily be neglected, nor left as uſeleſs or ſuperfluous.——Every one is pleaſed to be treated with the appearance of reſpect, and no prudent man would therefore refuſe to pay it—If pleaſure can be communicated

municated at ſo cheap a rate, no good natured perſon would neglect the means. Whatever contributes to the good underſtanding, and mutual reſpect of ſocial life, ought not by any means to be rejected. There is enough of malignity in human nature to diſorder the peace and commerce of mankind, without creating coldneſs by a ſtudied negligence of civility, or a rude or careleſs, or perhaps affected contempt of the eſtabliſhed and expected forms of politeneſs. We ſhould endeavour as much as poſſible to cheriſh the principle of ſocial benevolence, and, as St. *Paul* ſays, be in ſome meaſure *all things to all men.* Whatever may advance the happineſs or ſatisfaction of our neighbour, Chriſtian charity obliges us to offer: Whatever would diſcompoſe. or diſguſt him, we ough-,

in juſtice, to avoid, as we might eaſily conclude, it would be unwelcome to ourſelves. To encourage and exhort to reſpect and amity; to engage mankind in mutual good offices, and *to preſerve the unity of the ſpirit in the bond of peace*, ſeems to have been the view of the apoſtle, when he enjoined us *to love as brethren, to be pitiful, and to be courteous.*

SERMON X.

The Patience of Job, not an imitable Example for Christians.

Preached at a Funeral, 1763.

JOB xiv. 13.

O that thou wouldest hide me in the grave! That thou wouldest keep me secret until thy wrath be past! That thou wouldest appoint me a set time! and remember me!

IT is natural for us, under the anguish of great afflictions, to make unnatural wishes.

To ſhun by every means the approach of death, and to preſerve theſe frail Beings as long as poſſible, was implanted in our nature by the unerring will of Providence.—Were we ſo little deſirous of life, and ſo little afraid of death, as to ſeek and wiſh for it upon every little uneaſineſs, the human ſpecies would be deſtroyed, and this world would become a deſert, or be inhabited only by ſavages, by creatures that have neither the knowledge nor the deſire of death—The race of man, I ſay, would *periſh from off the face of the earth*; for what human being is ſo happy that he is not ſome time or other uneaſy?

It was the wiſdom of Providence then that ordered it otherwiſe: For, though the divine Power has permitted enough of

of miſery in the world to wean our hearts from it, yet he has given us ſuch an apprehenſive fear of death as is ſufficient, in general, to reconcile us to this life, till, in the common courſe of nature, it is brought to an end.

Hence it is that ſo ſoon as ſorrow vaniſhes at the appearance of hope; ſo ſoon as the languor of ſickneſs is paſt, or the pain of diſappointment is grown older by a day, we begin once more to look forward with chearfulneſs, and *to run with patience the race that is ſet before us.* Such is the general condition of life; and they who are and have been the happieſt of mankind, muſt acknowledge that the picture bears ſome reſemblance to their own circumſtances.

It is poſſible, however, that, in caſes of extreme calamity, death may be wiſhed for in earneſt. There are ſome conditions of life ſo abſolutely wretched, that the deſire of living would almoſt ſeem unreaſonable. Who would wiſh for the continuation of a being to which every day brought the heavy taſk of miſery, and to which *wearisome nights were appointed?* Should we not, under ſuch circumſtances, be ready to cry out with the Apoſtle—*Who ſhall deliver us from theſe bodies of death?* or with the afflicted Patriarch, to entreat that we might *be hid* from ſorrow *in the grave*—In ſome dark and ſilent manſion of the earth, where we and our miſeries might lie down together, and where we ſhould no longer languiſh at the ſight of the ſun?

Theſe are wiſhes, which, though inconſiſtent with the firſt great law of nature, the preſervation of our being, it is, as I have obſerved, very natural to form under the keen anguiſh of affliction.

Let us go into the houſe of mourning, and hear the complaint of the ſufferer. Hear him under the agonies of acute pain. Is he not ready to exclaim with the man of *Uzz*, "Let the *grave* "*open for me! and let the jaws of de-* "*ſtruction receive her prey! O God! how* "*long wilt thou withhold thy hand? O* "*that I might have my requeſt! and that* "*God would grant me the thing that I* "*long for, even that it would pleaſe God* "*to deſtroy me: that he would let looſe his* "*hand and cut me off!*"

Theſe

Thoſe whom chance or charity has brought to the bed of affliction, are no ſtrangers to ſuch language as this.

But could this be the language, you will ſay, of *Job?* Could he wiſh for death, who believed it to be the end of all fleſh? Who could ſay that, *As the cloud is conſumed, and vaniſheth away: So he that goeth down to the grave ſhall come up no more?* Could he who had no hopes, or, if any, but obſcure hopes of immortality, wiſh for a diſſolution of this mortal body, and to be ſhut up in the chambers of darkneſs for ever?—But, what then would he have done, had he lived under the glorious light of the goſpel? Would he not have wiſhed, with ſtill greater impatience, *to be diſſolved and to be with Jeſus?* or, perhaps,

perhaps, with the proſpect of the everlaſting promiſes, he might have *endured the croſs, deſpiſing* the pain. Poſſibly, under the influence of Chriſtian fortitude, he might have triumphed over the calamities of time, exulting in the hopes, the glorious hopes of eternity. Probably he would have acknowledged, with the eloquent Apoſtle, that *the ſufferings of the preſent life are not worthy to be compared with the glory that ſhall be revealed in us.*

No doubt, ſuch a conduct would have been greater. Human nature never riſes to ſuch a glorious pitch of excellence, ſuch an heavenly dignity, as when, imitating the example of our great and godlike maſter, we bear with patience

patience the evils that are fallen upon us—When from the ſpirit of pure and chearful piety, we ſay, " O God, thy " will be done." This is the proper conduct, the reaſonable ſervice of a Chriſtian: But to attain to this perfect ſtate of mind, requires no inferior portion either of ſenſe, or grace. It is neceſſary that we ſhould be able to form a due eſtimate of life, to balance in an equal ſcale it's good and evil things, and from thence to draw juſt reflections concerning it. This philoſophical knowledge is requiſite; it is expedient; but it is not *alone* ſufficient to inſpire us with Chriſtian fortitude. The concluſions of knowledge, and the reſolutions of reaſon will ſhrink under the blaſt of affliction, and, without the concurring aid

aid of divine grace, they will ineffectually ſtrive to ſet the heart at eaſe.

Under thoſe afflictions, therefore, which are incident to our being, let us not, like unhappy Job, importune the Almighty that we may be permitted to lay it down, but rather let us intreat him that he would give us grace and fortitude, to ſupport with patience the lot which has befallen us.

One very powerful reaſon why we ſhould do this is, that we ourſelves are the cauſe of almoſt all the miſery we endure. What, in general, are the evils we complain of but the conſequence of ſome miſconduct, ſome paſſion wrong-directed, ſome biaſs of the mind, or ſome weakneſs of the body, brought on

on by imprudence, by negligence, or by obſtinacy? Should we then, thus circumſtanced, hazard a deſire to ruſh into the preſence of our Almighty Maker? Should we venture to complain of thoſe evils which befal us in the common courſe of nature? Should we not rather beſeech the diſpenſer of all good things, to remove the burthen from us in the way of his Providence, but ſtill that he would permit us to continue in his ſervice, that we might exert that gratitude which is due to him both for our creation, and preſervation?

This certainly would be a conduct more becoming a Chriſtian than that of *Job*.

That unhappy Patriarch was but a very imperfect example of patience, compared to the author of Chriſtianity. When did our divine maſter utter the impatient exclamations which we find in the book of Job? *Father*, ſaid he, *if this cup may not paſs away from me, unleſs I drink it, thy will be done.* And yet this cup was a more bitter potion than the man of *Uzz* was condemned to drink. Remember we not the agonies that he underwent? Remember we not the dreadful hour, when, previous to his paſſion, the Evangeliſt tells us, that *he ſweat as it were great drops of blood.* We are aſſured by thoſe who are ſkilled in medicinal knowledge, that this could not have been without the moſt exquiſite torment.

torment. And I mention this circumſtance to ſhew you the difference between Chriſtianity and Judaiſm, when the higheſt character in the latter appears ſo incomparably mean, conſidered under the circumſtances of affliction, with the author of the former.

It is from the doctrine and example of Jeſus, then, and not of Job, that we are to learn the virtue of patience; and this caution is the more neceſſary, becauſe when the Old and New Teſtament come united into our hands, as the invariable word of God, we are apt to ſeek the rules of faith equally in the former as in the latter. This, by no means ought to be. The doctrines of the Old Teſtament were built upon a very

a very different foundation from thoſe of the New. (The conditions of the covenant were changed, and not only the terms of ritual obedience were varied, but the principles of moral duty were infinitely improved.) It is from the New Teſtament alone, therefore, that we are to derive the rules of life, and the precepts of conduct. *He who is in Chriſt Jeſus*, as the Apoſtle ſays, that is, he who has been admitted into the Chriſtian church, is a new creature: *Old things are paſſed away; behold! all things are become new.*)

In preaching from a text like this, wherein the author of it quarrels with that being which God had given him, I thought it neceſſary to obſerve in what

manner a Chriſtian ought to behave under the like circumſtances.

But in favour of the perſon who appointed this text, let us remember how very difficult it is not to wiſh for death, when life is deſtitute of every comfort; when it is embittered with ſorrow and ſickneſs, with penury and pain.

I have before obſerved, that to arrive at that great pitch of Chriſtian perfection, which implies an uncomplaining reſignation, requires both great parts, and uncommon graces. It cannot, therefore, be the lot of the multitude.

We all know our readineſs to complain——and where is the great ſoul that

that ſuffers in ſilence? We muſt endeavour to imitate thoſe ſublime perfections of which our divine Maſter has given us an example; but let us look with candour and compaſſion on thoſe ſuffering brethren who travel night and day through the paths of ſorrow; who have their bed in darkneſs, and their pillow on the thorn.

We are all frail and changeable creatures: A perfect character is not in human nature; and he, who dares to ſay that he is faultleſs, is a hypocrite, who wants to impoſe either on his own heart, or on the world, or, poſſibly, on both.

With reſpect to the character of the deceaſed, ſhe appeared to be a pious

and conſcientious Chriſtian, who, while ſhe was attentive to the duties of her ſtation, was by no means remiſs in thoſe of her religion. It muſt be remembered to her credit that ſhe was the induſtrious mother of a family, diligent *to provide her houſhold their portion in due ſeaſon.* Thus ſhe united in her own perſon the characters both of Martha and of Mary, chuſing the *good part of* the one, and the *uſeful part* of the other.

She, therefore, who had led ſuch a life, might, with the more propriety, be deſirous of that diſſolution, by means of which alone ſhe could receive the fulneſs of thoſe rewards that are laid up for the juſt.

She had, moreover, another motive for this ſeemingly unnatural deſire of death: For ſhe had, not long before her laſt ſickneſs, buried her huſband, an honeſt and induſtrious man, who had divided with her the cares and the labours of life.——When ſhe was deprived of the partner of her affections, when ſhe had taken her laſt leave of him who contributed to her happineſs and ſupport, no wonder if ſhe grew weary of a life, that was at the beſt but ſolitary and uncomfortable.

Suffer theſe apologies to plead for the deceaſed; over whoſe foibles, what ever they were, charity ſhould throw a veil, while it withholds not that praiſe which her virtues merited, though thoſe

virtues were obſcured by an humble ſtation.

For us, who are aſſembled on this occaſion, we cannot but derive inſtruction from every circumſtance that attends it. And it is principally on our account, indeed, that ſuch diſcourſes as theſe are exerciſed. To the dead they are nothing. The laſt offices that are paid to them can only be uſeful as they are lectures to the living: So far, however, they are certainly of uſe: For notwithſtanding the various *mementos* of mortality that we meet with, notwithſtanding that death has eſtabliſhed his empire over all the works of nature, through ſome infatuation or other we are ſtill apt to forget that we were born to die: We go on

on from one deſign to another, we add hope to hope, and lay out plans for the employment or the ſubſiſtence of many years, till life itſelf is at an end, and we are alarmed by the appearance of the phantom of death, at an hour which we had concluded to be mid-day.

Let us, therefore, *have our loins always girded up, and our lamps burning*, that we may be in readineſs to take our journey to that far, far-diſtant country, from which no ſpirit returns.

Let us be diligent to procure the favour of that eternal being, whoſe influence extends over all worlds!

By the light of his countenance we ſhall walk without trembling through

thoſe gloomy regions where all things are forgotten; and when *death itſelf ſhall be made ſubject unto him*, then ſhall we riſe to that immortal inheritance, which is promiſed to our faith, our piety, and our patience.

SERMON XI.

The Condition of Poverty better than that of Riches abuſed.

ECCLES. iv. 6.

Better is an handful with quietneſs, than both the hands full with travail and vexation of ſpirit.

AMONG the numbers that diſquiet themſelves in vain, there are none farther from the road of happineſs than thoſe who toil inſatiably for the acquiſition

tion of riches. A mind that has this bias can ſeldom be at eaſe; for the goods of fortune are in a ſtate of perpetual fluctuation, and that man muſt know but little repoſe, who reſts his hopes on what chance may take away.

Certainly avarice is a ſpecies of madneſs; if madneſs be nothing more than an abſence, or a ſuſpenſion of reaſon: For who can be more deſtitute of reaſon than he *who chuſes the evil and ſhuns the good?* Yet ſuch is the conduct of the man who hath *ſet his heart on the increaſe of riches.* In a life whoſe days are *few and evil*, he is hourly adding to that evil by an unneceſſary anxiety to make proviſion for a life that ſhould have many days. The beſt privilege of wealth would be the enjoyment

ment of quiet, but he forfeits that quiet for the acquiſition of more: His deſires are not bounded by the wants of nature, or the decent conveniencies of life; money is the object of his affections, and while he labours to acquire it, the uſe of it is forgot.

But though there is no infatuation that takes hold of the human mind, more unaccountably ridiculous than this inordinate love of wealth, it is certain that no vice or folly whatever is more difficult to ſubdue. When covetouſneſs has once entrenched itſelf in the heart, it bids defiance to every attack from without, and is equally proof againſt the ſolid force of reaſon, or the lighter weapons of ridicule. It is in vain that a covetous man is made the

jeſt

jeſt of the liberal, or branded with folly by the wiſe——it is in vain to argue with him——it is in vain to preach to him; and 'tis only with a view of ſecuring thoſe from avarice who are yet untainted with it that I mention the miſeries of it in this diſcourſe.

The covetous man, I have already obſerved, is deſtitute of reaſon: In his conduct he is evidently ſo; but as moſt human beings, and even madmen think that they act agreeably to reaſon, let us endeavour to find out upon what principles the man of avarice is reconciled to himſelf.

Doubtleſs he imagines, like the man of pleaſure, that he is in the only way that leadeth to happineſs; for the purſuit

ſuit of that is the firſt mover with us all. He imagines ſo, I ſay, but upon what grounds? He knows that wealth will purchaſe every outward convenience of life——that it will procure us reſpect, and ſet us free from labour: This he concludes, and, ſo far, he judges rightly——"But it is not a lit-
"tle, ſays he, that will do theſe things;
"I muſt have yet more before I can
"quietly and comfortably ſit down to
"enjoy it——Well; now I have ob-
"tained what I propoſed; yet there is
"one piece of dignity which I ſhould
"be glad to have, but which my for-
"tune will ſcarcely bear, therefore I
"muſt have yet more, before I can
"quietly and comfortably ſit down to
"enjoy it." Thus he reaſons with himſelf, till——he dies——till he is ſurprized

ſurprized to find that life is at an end, while he is yet only in the *way* to happineſs.

But this mode of reaſoning is followed only by one ſet of the covetous. There are many, who, without any view to future or diſtant happineſs neither have, nor ſeek any other pleaſure than that of hoarding and accumulating. Theſe are far gone in the money-loving madneſs, and have not even a pretence to juſtify their conduct by reaſon. Gold is their idol, and their covetouſneſs is, as the Apoſtle terms it, Idolatry. Theſe are equally guilty, but they are not more happy than the wretch I have been juſt deſcribing; for, like thoſe poor Indians, who give up half their food to their idols, they go without common neceſſaries

neceſſaries to increaſe their treaſure, and ſtarve themſelves to lay up the proviſions of life.

It was not ſo much my deſign, upon this occaſion, to expoſe the criminal nature of covetouſneſs, as to prove the miſery that attends it; but as virtue is certainly a means of happineſs, I may obſerve that it muſt be unknown to the man of avarice; for it is ſcarce poſſible that he ſhould have any virtue. The ſocial virtues are thoſe which, in their practice, are moſt peculiarly delightful; but what ſocial virtue can a covetous man be capable of? To relieve the wants of his fellow-creatures, would be inconſiſtent with his principles of ſaving—To compaſſionate their miſeries, to yield them the conſolations of a feeling

ing heart——Of that he is equally incapable: For the heart of avarice never feels. The tender ſenſations of pity, the warmth of ſocial love, the glow of friendſhip, and the liberal joy that is inſpired by the general happineſs, he never felt, or deſired to feel. His heart, abſorbed in the loweſt of vulgar paſſions, the love of glittering earth, knows no other affection, no ſuperior ſentiment. To the happineſs that is derived from the intercourſe of ſociety he is an utter ſtranger, for he looks for nothing more from his connections with his fellow-creatures than the advancement of his favourite views, the increaſe of his wealth.

II. Yet, thus miſerable as he is, he may poſſibly think himſelf happier than the

the poor who is *deſpiſed of his neighbour*. If he does, let him go with us a moment into the cottage of humble labour and contented poverty.

What do I hear in this place? the voice of joy! the ſimple ſong of chearful innocence! How ſtill, how peaceful is this ruſtic habitation! Sure this is the dwelling of quietneſs! She has taken up her abode beneath this humble roof, and *health* and *content* and *chearfulneſs* are her inmates. Behold! here is a matron following her daily employment, and two ſmiling children playing by her! See, how her eye is filled with maternal affection! and how ſhe rejoices, while ſhe earns their proviſion of bread! Behold, now, the good man is returned from the field, and the humble board is ſpread for

his repaſt! How plain and ſimple is his food! a mere ſufficiency for the ſupport of nature! 'Tis indeed but a *handful*—But it is eaten in *quietneſs*. Here is nothing of that ſuperfluity which ſolicits the palled appetite of luxury: But here is enough for nature: Here is a handful, and ſhe aſks no more.

III. From this ſcene of *humble* happineſs, let us go to the dwelling of the rich. Is this a ſocial dwelling, or is it a priſon?—Behold! we cannot gain admiſſion—the gates are made faſt with bolts of iron. This is a ſure ſign that ſecurity is not here; and yet ſecurity is the friend of happineſs. But who is yonder that walks ſo penſively, with looks of ſuſpicion? It is the maſter of the houſe—he ſeems diſturbed—he ſaw

us

us approach, and concluded that we were coming to make him poor.

Miſerable wretch! what profit haſt thou in the abundance that thou poſſeſſeſt? Both thy hands, indeed, are full, but ſo likewiſe is thy heart—full of trouble and endleſs vexation. Or haſt thou a moment's peace? How ſoon is it liable to be deſtroyed? *The moth and the ruſt* ſhall *corrupt* thine unſunned garments,—the *thief ſhall break through and ſteal* thy *treaſure.* A misfortune *that* which thou wilt never be able to ſurvive; for where thy *treaſure is* there is thy *heart alſo.*

Miſerable wretch! Caſt away that wealth which is the bane of thy happineſs—Go to that poverty which thou dreadeſt, and to be happy, firſt be poor.

Strange doctrine this to thee! But *know for all this that* it is juſt. The poor, whom thou deſpiſeſt, are happier than thou art.—Didſt thou not hear the ſong of chearfulneſs, didſt thou not ſee the ſmile of contented induſtry, where there was but a *handful?*

Miſerable wretch! What a painful, what a troubleſome life doſt thou lead! Thy ſervants curſe thee—Thy friends forſake thee—Friends did I ſay? Thou never hadſt a friend; but thoſe that might naturally have been thy friends deſert thee, and ſcarce forbear to wiſh ſo uſeleſs a being dead.

Miſerable wretch! In what ſordid meanneſs doſt thou paſs thy days? With what jealouſy doſt thou look upon the very

very cringing dependents that pick up a wretched pittance at thy board! And are thy nights leſs painful, or leſs vexatious than thy days? Does ſleep, undiſturbed ſleep await thee? Art thou acquainted with quietneſs and repoſe? No —theſe are ſtrangers, to whom *thy* gates are not opened. Theſe have no ſociety with cares, and fears and perplexities, ſuch as thou art expoſed to both by day and by night. *Better*, ſurely, *is a handful with quietneſs*, than thy hoarded wealth, with thy *vexation of ſpirit*.

Thus far of avarice, the peculiar wretchedneſs of which the preacher, no doubt, had in view: But wealth has miſeries ariſing from other cauſes than covetouſneſs, which render *a handful with quietneſs* ſtill preferable.

IV. Riches are not *neceſſarily* productive of evil. They may be made the means of happineſs when properly managed. They may contribute to the gratification of benevolence, and to the exerciſe of almoſt every ſocial virtue. They may be employed in the diffuſion of knowledge, or in the relief of indigence; and when converted to theſe purpoſes, they are a real bleſſing: They increaſe the happineſs of a benevolent temper, and give pleaſure to their poſſeſſors, while they are uſeful to ſociety.

But it is ſeldom that they are employed to theſe happy and beneficent ends. The right uſe of them is moſt commonly perverted, and what might have been a bleſſing is rendered a curſe by the abuſe of it.

When

When riches are made ſubſervient only to pride—when they are employed in fooliſh vanity, and empty oſtentation, what do they produce but *travail and vexation of ſpirit?* Thoſe who place their happineſs in being admired for ſplendour, will be frequently mortified by negligence, or traduced by envy. We are very unwilling to pay that deference which is expected from us only on the account of magnificence, and, whatever may be the cauſe of that unwillingneſs, it is certainly very reaſonable; for he who hopes to be admired for that which gives him no merit, offers an inſult to the underſtanding of him from whom he looks for admiration—But when that admiration is withheld, *vanity* is mortified; and wealth, by being ſubſervient to her deſires, brings her only *travail and anguiſh of ſpirit.*

As much perverted is the uſe of riches, when they are employed in the gratification of luxury, and, of conſequence, when thus uſed, they bring nothing but *vexation*.

Thoſe, who, like the prodigal in the Goſpel, ſpend their *ſubſtance in riotous living*, lay up for themſelves almoſt all the miſeries that are incident to human nature: For what can be more wretched than the condition of him who is equally deſtitute both of health and peace? Whoſe body is tormented with pain and diſeaſe, while his mind is racked with the reflection of guilt and folly?—Yet ſuch generally are the fruits of intemperance.

In theſe, and in many other reſpects, may the goods of fortune be abuſed; and

and hence that *ſore evil under the ſun*, viz. *riches given to the hurt of the owners!*

Let us then conclude, with the wiſe preacher, that a little, with content and quietneſs, is preferable to *much treaſure, and trouble therewith.* Let us be aſſured that peace of mind, as there can be no happineſs without it, is the firſt thing worth our ſeeking. If this *quietneſs* is to be met with more frequently in an humble than in a high ſtation, let us not be dazzled with falſe appearances, but conclude that the humble ſtation is the better.

We have ſeen that riches are frequently a misfortune to thoſe that poſſeſs them—we have ſeen the miſeries of avarice, the diſcontent of vanity, and the pains

pains of intemperance—Should we not then rather avoid than ſigh for a condition that might expoſe us to miſery, to diſcontent and pain?

Let us not flatter ourſelves that we ſhould act more wiſely than others in ſituations which we have contemplated but never tried; for no man knows what influence a change of circumſtances will have upon him, before that change comes to paſs. New acceſſions of fortune bring with them new wants, new ſentiments, and new deſires; and that man acts with a laudable firmneſs, who, when he becomes wealthier, does not become worſe.

In one word—Let us remember that it is both our duty and our happineſs to be

be contented with the ſtation which Providence has aſſigned us; and, though we have but a *handful*, if we poſſeſs it in quietneſs, it is *better than both the hands full, with travail and vexation of ſpirit*.

SERMON XII.

The Public Utility of charitable Inſtitutions.

Preached at St. Sepulchre's, London, for the Benefit of the Charity-Girls. March 26, 1762.

PROV. x. 15.

The Deſtruction of the Poor, is their Poverty.

OF all the inſtitutions that have done honour to human virtue, thoſe that have been eſtabliſhed on the principles of unintereſted charity are deſervedly

edly the moſt diſtinguiſhed—We may be incited to great actions by a thirſt of honour, by an emulation of excellence, or a deſire to be recorded in the hiſtory of mankind. Theſe are honourable, but they are ſelfiſh motives. It is then only that we acquire unſullied glory, when we are virtuous from motives in which ſelf has no concern; when out of pure benevolence, and the love of human kind, we relieve the indigent, or reſcue the oppreſt.

It cannot be without peculiar ſatisfaction that we ſee our country diſtinguiſhed by this public-ſpirited virtue—It muſt be with the greateſt complacency we conſider that to be born Britons, is not only to be the heirs of freedom, but to be the ſons of benevolence

volence—not only to inherit the liberty which our forefathers have delivered down to us ſacred, but to add new virtues to thoſe they have left us, and to be diſtinguiſhed at once by bravery and beneficence—not only, like them, to *break every yoke*, but to *bind up the broken hearted*, and to *let the oppreſſed go free*.

To ſave the poor from the miſeries that are entailed upon their unhappy condition, is the firſt and greateſt object of ſocial charity, becauſe it many times happens that their poverty is their deſtruction.

It is probable, that the wiſe man had in his eye many different ways, wherein the poverty of the poor might contribute

tribute to their deſtruction; and it may be worth our while, not only as Chriſtians, but as members of the community, to conſider in what manner ſo numerous a part of the public body, as the poor are, may be ſaid to be *deſtroyed* by poverty. The dangers and difficulties that await the unhappy perſon who is born to extreme indigence are very many and very great. In a ſtate of infancy, indeed, he is inſenſible of the miſeries that ſurround him; *then* he knows not that ſecret anguiſh which pierces the breaſt of a father, when he looks upon him as deſtined to ſuffer all the hardſhips he has himſelf endured; *then* he underſtands not that painful tear which flows from the eye of a mother, when ſhe beholds him helpleſs as he leans upon her breaſt, and fears

that

that the following day may not afford them bread. The following day comes, but proviſion comes not to ſupport it; and the unhappy infant now mixes his tears with thoſe of his wretched parents, tears that fall from the diſtreſſes of nature! many ſuch days probably muſt he ſuffer, till his parents, overcome by the afflictions of continued want, at laſt let go their integrity; and give up their hapleſs offspring into the arms of ſome infamous ſtroller, who carries him about to excite compaſſion, and to juſtify her idle pretenſions to beg. His ſituation is now moſt deplorable, while by day he ſuffers the pain of cold and hunger, that his cries and miſerable aſpect may add to the ſucceſs of the wretched mendicant he accompanies, and at night is thrown into ſome dungeon unregarded, while

ſhe

ſhe intoxicates herſelf with the profits of the day. In this pitiable ſtate he continues, till the extremes of cold and want put an end to his innocent being; or, if he lives, he probably lives only to further ſufferings, with a decrepit body, and a mind uninformed by any thing but what it could gather from ſcenes of low debauchery.

Thus accompliſhed, he continues the only buſineſs he is acquainted with, the buſineſs of begging; or, if he has been trained by his preceptreſs to the more expeditious way of procuring money, *the ſcience of ſtealing*, what ſhould deter him from putting it in practice? *His* mind was never tinctured with the precepts of juſtice or religion. He never knew the ſenſe of ſhame or honeſty, or

any other moral reſtraint: And the fear of human puniſhment will operate very feebly, when oppoſed by the importunities of want, and when life is poſſeſſed of nothing to make it worth his preſerving. Thus, in a ſeries of vice and wretchedneſs, paſſes his whole life, a miſery to himſelf, and a prejudice to the community in which he had the *misfortune* to be born.

This picture you may poſſibly think an uncommon one—would to God it were more ſo than it is! but if it be drawn from truth, it may now be ſaid with equal propriety, as it was of old, that the *deſtruction of the poor is their poverty.*

Whatever inſtitution, then, is ſet on foot to prevent theſe unhappy conſequences

quences of indigence, it merits the higheſt praiſe; and, as it tends to the benefit of the community, it has a right to the encouragement, not only of individuals, but of the ſtate.

And here I cannot forbear to obſerve that, in my opinion, all has not been done that might be done towards this uſeful end. In an ancient republic, famous for the wiſdom of its policy, the children of the poor were taken under the protection of the ſtate, and inſtructed in thoſe arts to which their genius ſeemed adapted, or their inclinations led them. If *Sparta* could do this and profit by it, ſurely *Britain* has it in her power. For, as a mercantile nation, that muſt always be poſſeſſed of a large naval force, ſhe has much more employment for her youth

than ever *Sparta* had, and as ſhe is poſſeſſed of very extenſive dominions, many of which are uncultivated, ſhe ought to encourage every motive to the increaſe of population. Add to this, that ſhe has a variety of manufactures, in ſeveral branches of which, children may be employed from the firſt dawn of reaſon, and taught to earn their bread by their manual labour.

But, to leave theſe conſiderations to the wiſdom and benevolence of the legiſlature, let us, according to the abilities that God has given us, labour to prevent thoſe diſtreſſes, and that deſtruction to which the poor are expoſed. Let us not merely act the part of idle declaimers, nor content ourſelves with being acute ſpeculatiſts, or ingenious ſchemers,

ſchemers, for one virtue in the heart is preferable to a thouſand in the head.

But even the heart too is apt to deceive itſelf, and while it contains the ſeeds of many latent virtues, finds ſome way or other to prevent them from ripening into uſe. If we find that we are not deſtitute of general wiſhes for human happineſs; if we applaud the charity of the benevolent, and the hoſpitality of the liberal; if we join in condemning the niggard hand of the ſelfiſh, or the ſordid heart of avaritious wealth, we conclude that we are friends to the common welfare; and while we plead the cauſe of virtue, number ourſelves among her votaries, though we never bear one offering to her temple.——This fault, I am afraid, may be too generally pre-

valent——and there are few perhaps, who, after a candid attention to their own conſciences, may not ſay, "this "has more than once been the caſe "with us." But, to prevent the deluſions of this ſelf-deceiving heart, ſurely nothing more is neceſſary than to detect them: When the gate of truth is once diſcovered, what have we to do but to enter in: *To behold her fair beauty, and to viſit her temple!*

To be charitable is a province of virtue that is open to all. We ought, indeed, to eſteem it a peculiar happineſs that the author of our ſalvation has made the practical virtues ſo eaſy and ſo obvious; but, at the ſame time, we ſhould remember, that, in proportion as they are eaſy, the omiſſion of them will be criminal,

criminal, and that our *eſcape* will be the more difficult, if we have neglected to do what might ſo eaſily have been done.

If the thing be maturely conſidered, there is ſcarce any excuſe to be made for the neglect of charitable contribution; for as all, who are not themſelves objects of charity, have it in their power, ſo the duty is equally incumbent on all. But it frequently happens that people of moderate fortunes recommend it to the wealthy, and the wealthy, to be even with them, leave it to the care of people of moderate fortunes. The former think themſelves exempted from a duty which ſeems more particularly to belong to the opulent, and the latter, wrapt up in the ſecurity of independent affluence, think that the cares of virtue, like all others,

may be left to thoſe who were born to labour. The miſtake is very unfortunate on both ſides: And both will find at laſt, to their mortification, that neither riches can place us above the ſocial duties of life, nor the want of them below them. The rich man ſhall perceive that he was miſtaken, when he thought wealth his ſtrong hold, and he, who ſuppoſed himſelf excuſed from charity, by being comparatively poor, ſhall find, that his poverty was not his virtue.

With reſpect to the inſtitution of charity-ſchools in particular, and the encouragement that they deſerve, it may be expected that I ſhould advance ſome arguments; and, indeed, many might be advanced, but ſo much has upon all occaſions been ſaid in their behalf, and

ſo

ſo little againſt them, that it may be juſtly thought ſuperfluous; for, whatever will admit of the moſt arguments in its favour, certainly wants them the leaſt. As to all that has been urged againſt them by the author of the Fable of the Bees, it is mere ingenious ſophiſtry, the ſtale method of expoſing all the foibles to which any inſtitution is liable, and paſſing, with ſacred ſilence, over every thing that is valuable or excellent in it. Such ſophiſts deſerve not to be anſwered, but with the contempt they deſerve they ought to be mentioned.

To you, who have been long convinced of the utility of theſe eſtabliſhments, I am perſuaded, there is no occaſion to uſe arguments in defence of them; yet if arguments were neceſſary, they might all be concentered in theſe ſhort poſi-

tions,

tions, viz. whether, in a Chriſtian ſtate, it were more proper that the children of the poor ſhould be Chriſtians or barbarians; naked or cloathed; inſtructed to earn their bread by the arts of honeſt labour, or brought up in idle ignorance to become a burthen to the community.

To you, whoſe BENEVOLENCE is founded on the principles of *reaſon*, I am ſatisfied, there is ſtill *leſs* occaſion for eloquence than for argument—yet, if eloquence were neceſſary, behold it there * ! Behold the ſupplicating looks of helpleſs innocence!—how powerfully they plead! what rhetoric can move like the diſtreſſes of innocence? If our tenderneſs is not awaked by thoſe, will it yield to the power of words; to the

* Referring to the children.

animated

animated colours of ſtrong deſcription, or the tuneful flow of poliſhed periods? Yes, ye poor daughters of ſorrow! born to no hope but the humanity of your fellow-creatures, your own miſeries ſhall plead your cauſe—your own unhappy circumſtances ſhall excite compaſſion in every *gentle* breaſt, ſhall call forth the tear from every *tender* eye, ſhall open every *generous* hand to contribute to your relief. We know that your reſources are ſmall, that the capital which ſupports you is extremely reduced, and that, for the principles of a virtuous and uſeful education, you depend, in a great meaſure, on the liberality of this audience. On their munificence you depend for thoſe inſtructions that muſt ſave you from folly and from vice, and thoſe induſtrious arts which muſt be your future ſupport.

What

What joy muſt it be to every good mind, on ſuch an affecting occaſion, to exerciſe it's benevolence! to indulge the ſweeteſt of all paſſions, *the tender delight of pity!*

Let us, my friends, prove ourſelves not to be deſtitute of humanity, by indulging it on the occaſion before us. Let us inveſt the fleeting poſſeſſions of this world in the happy ſecurity of immortal life! Let us lay up our treaſures in that ſafe repoſitory, which is free from the inroads of the robber, and the ruſt of time! The works of charity alone are immortal. Other virtues ſhall die. Other excellencies ſhall decay with decaying nature. Dignity and learning, and arts, and honours ſhall not outlaſt the beating pulſe, nor ſurvive the ruins of the grave. *Whether there be tongues,*

they ſhall fail, whether there be knowledge it ſhall vaniſh away, but charity ſhall live for ever—ſecure in the favour of that unchangeable Being, who has pronounced it the beſt of human virtues. To obtain the favour of that Being, how great were the emulation! What were the ſacrifice of life or honour, of power or affluence, to be repaid by his ſupreme rewards! To receive the laſt, beſt gift of immortality from the divine bounty, and to be lodged in the boſom of everlaſting love! when the cares and fears, and ſorrows that ſurround us are no more—*then* to exchange theſe regions of pain and poverty for the glorious inheritance of eternal life; when the Son of God himſelf ſhall repeat his invitation, ſaying, "Come ye bleſſed children "of my Father, receive the kingdom

"prepared

" prepared for you from the beginning
" of the world; for I was hungry and
" ye gave me meat, thirſty and ye gave
" me drink, a ſtranger and ye took me
" in, naked and ye cloathed me."

5 JY 61

END of the FIRST VOLUME.